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We Were Asked to Deny a Part of Ourselves —and We Did: How Black Women Doctoral Students Experience Their Intersectional Identities in Race-Based Activism

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WE WERE ASKED TO DENY A PART OF OURSELVES —AND WE DID: HOW BLACK WOMEN DOCTORAL STUDENTS EXPERIENCE THEIR INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES IN RACE-BASED ACTIVISM

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ABSTRACT

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This study explored the experiences of 10 Black women doctoral students' experiences with their intersectional identities in race-based activist work. Grounded in Black feminist thought and critical race feminism, participants engaged in a multi-method inquiry that employed in-depth interviews. "Artistic Story" was additionally used as a method to provoke intentional reflection. Counterstory methodology with the influences of testimonio and testifying techniques, coupled with an endarkend feminist epistemology, situated the study to commit to a reflective process that engaged the researcher and the participants simultaneously. The data analysis first revealed the theme unconscious back-seating, where participants were regulated to the back-seat in ways that they were not fully aware. Additionally, the subthemes identified that these women were socialized to serve, had a fear of isolation, in which they did not want to cause riffs among the Black community, and the women were bringing other voices, to center marginalized persons. Secondly, the theme, conscious back-seating indicated how the participants were back-seated in ways they intentionally chose. The subtheme, Fuck it! I'll do it! expressed the frustration participants felt when movement was slow on issues or other items were not being addressed, thus they took on the work. Implications and recommendations included Black women developing self-care and

mental health practices and centering Black women in conversations on womanhood and sexism.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

[redacted] intersectionality [redacted] am I woman or am I Black? [redacted] trying to be Black, and a woman, and queer, and [redacted] to focus on one of those things, [redacted] you don't make any headway. [redacted] I find that as a Black woman activist, [redacted] how we support Black women [redacted] Not much [redacted] you never usually see that [redacted] I need to go back and connect with them [redacted]

[redacted] and connect with them[redacted] (Kleon, 2010[1]; Ladenheim, 2014; Lenzy, 2016).

Developed from a pilot research study, the above poem expresses key themes I address in this dissertation. Cultural and societal pressures often compound the complexity of identity. Historically, there has been an overarching focus in the Black community to center on race (Evans, 2015; hooks, 2000). The common thread, both in this poem and also in my own story, which will follow below, is the idea that race, specifically Blackness, trumps the experiences Black women have with their multiple identities. Therefore, in this dissertation I explored whether and, if so, how Black women's intersectional identities are recognized and acknowledged in race-based activism. In the next section I will use story, aligning with the spirit of community culture, to discuss how I arrived on this subject. In an effort to conscientiously center Black women's voice I used storytelling as a way to align with the methodology of counterstory. Counterstory is a means to communicate untold stories by those often on the fringes (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Thus, this technique will be used to bring forth the experience of Black women to illuminate their stories.

Background

In the fall of 2014, I entered my doctoral program as the #BlackLivesMatter (BLM) movement was reaching a crescendo. Developing as a battle cry to call

[1]*Newspaper Blackout (*Kleon, 2010) discussed the unique style of creating poetry, called newspaper blackout poetry. The concept has history that stems back to the mid-1700s with the original idea called "cross-readings." Essentially, an author creates a poem from existing text by removing words deemed unnecessary. What remains is a new reimaging of the words in a form of a poem. Blackout poetry is used in this dissertation to bring forth the essence of commentary during a research study from one participant on her experience of intersectional identity in race-based activism.

attention to numerous Black lives lost under police brutality, BLM eventually progressed into a political movement. Highlighting the continued violence and death of Black people, BLM spoke through social media to gain visibility and leverage. During this time my friends and I, along with many other Black people across the country, were not only appalled by the mounting accounts of violence, but also afraid for our lives. Moving to a mid-sized rural town added more uneasiness due to perceived conservative views and the known White supremacist history of the town's founding. However, what was perhaps the most frustrating was when discussing my discomfort with a Black man, he said I did not have to worry because the police brutality was geared toward Black men only. The erasure of my experience as both Black and a woman who was fighting against racism and sexism simultaneously was exacerbating. To have a Black man, who should have been an ally and support network, abandon me was more than overwhelming. The disregard of my fear was paralyzing. I had prepared for the defense of my existence among White peers, but I was not prepared to have to defend my life to my own people.

Unfortunately my experiences are not uncommon. Some scholars have noted that issues around anti-Black racism are solely attributed to Black men throughout history (Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 2014; Purdie-Vaughs & Eiback, 2008), which erases Black women's experiences. It seems Black women support the fight for racial justice, with Black men assuming the path to justice is one that is shared. hooks (2014) noted that the collective fight for racial justice has long been thought of as the only path to justice.

> Racist, sexist socialization had conditioned us to devalue our femaleness and to regard race as the only relevant label of identification. In other words, we were asked to deny a part of ourselves—and we did. . . . We clung to the hope that

> liberation from racial oppression would be all that was necessary for us to be free. We were a new generation of black women who had been taught to submit, to accept sexual inferiority, and to be silent. (hooks, 2014, pp. 1–2)

Though Black women have situated racial equality at the forefront for liberation for all Black people, what does it mean when not all aspects of racial equality are incorporated in that vision?

Damon Young's (2017) recent article on the Very Smart Brothas page of the Root website recently revisited the statement "straight black men are the white people of black people" (para. 9). The origin of the statement according to the article is somewhat of a mystery. However, the author noted that different representations of the statement could be found among a few articles, twitter posts, and other social media spaces (Young, 2017). Essentially the author, who identifies as a man, calls attention to Black men's privilege in having their struggles with racism centralized. Listing that police brutality, the National Football League boycott, and governmental initiatives, such as President Obama's My Brother's Keeper program, all have only had Black men in mind. Young (2017) also addressed how Black men still uphold patriarchy and pose a threat to Black women via harassment and misogyny. The article concluded with a brief discussion about how Black women simultaneously experience sexism and racism while also having Black men not acknowledge this experience.

Young's (2017) article sparked a social media frenzy with lengthy reader comments, multiple shares, and several counter and supportive commentaries. Among the criticism was the disbelief that Black men actually benefited in this way and that the article was anti-Black male. Though the title of the article was very upfront, the analysis within was strong and resonated with me. Attention was also drawn to Black men's defensiveness when they are called out about their contribution to Black

women's oppression around issues of sexism. It is as if Black men are in competition to hold the spot of the most oppressed. To acknowledge Black women's pain would mean surrendering their throne, a throne no one really wants to claim. Yet their stronghold on this title is paramount. Young's (2017) article is a real time example that highlights the invisibility of Black women in the conversation around injustice. Further, when critical analysis about this phenomenon is brought to light, the focus again shifts back to Black men when they counter critiques with reiteration of their experiences with oppression.

Race-Based Activism: A Working Definition

To fully understand the erasure of Black women's identities in activism, it is important to first define the area I am examining. First, to pinpoint the specifics of the topic under study, I narrowly define the aspects of this research to further situate the discussion. Therefore, this section outlines what activism is, what activities are included in this definition, and further explains race-based activism explicitly.

Corning and Myers (2002) defined activism orientation as a person's developing engagement in low and high-risk acts and behaviors that seek to solve socio-political problems. However, Stryker, Owens, and White (2000) noted that how a person views activism is influenced by one's individual identities. Therefore, motives to participate may be different across and within an organization (Stryker et al., 2000). Generally activist activities span a broad range. Acts such as voting and participation in rallies to large-scale protests could be involved and incorporates low- to high-risk actions (Corning & Myers, 2002).

These definitions provide a general scope of activism and allude to aspects of identity's impact on these understandings. Still, what is neglected is a focus on

specific themed activism. For the purpose of this research I am using the terminology of race-based activism, activism that is centered on justice seeking around issues of race. To provide space for the complexity of multiple identities, this definition also embraces multi-racial backgrounds. However, to provide some parameters for the definition, I include the caveat that one part of racial identity must be grounded in Blackness. I also leave room for additional interpretations from participants. Having a strict definition may not account for the full scope of these women's experiences. I do not want to limit or exclude their realities. Therefore, I operated from the outlined broad definition to leave room for nuance.

Additionally for the purpose of this study activist activities include any social or political activity for the purpose of seeking justice for an oppressed community that involves possible risk and/or harm to participants from opposing parties, such as marches, demonstrations, protests, and significant engagement in social media conversations (Corning & Myers, 2002; McCammon, Muse, Newman, & Terrell, 2007; Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010).

Problem Identification

Perhaps in an effort to streamline energies, much of contemporary activism only covers single-issue platforms. For instance, the civil rights movement and the women's movement included a diverse group of people among those involved in activities and/or supporting each agenda. However, specific concentration on how specific communities within these movements experienced racial oppression, sexism, and class bias was not centered. Though the work done was significant, it often did not consider how those from lower income, varying education levels, or different gender identity were contrastingly impacted (Breines, 1996; Simien & Clawson, 2004). A

single-issue based focus leaves those with multiple identities to choose to align themselves with one part of their identity for the purpose of protest. Further, social movements aim to develop a singular all-encompassing identity (Terriquez, 2015). However, this diminishes a person's unique experience with their multiple identities. Yet, intersectional mobilization suggests multiple identities can become salient in social movements (Terriquez, 2015). Terriquez (2015) argued that it is possible to have more than one identity centralized in social movements by capitalizing on activist strategies used in identity-based social movements as social movement spillover. Thus, the reach of one movement is greater than perhaps outlined in original goals as strategies, contributors, and activities become a part of other movements (Meyer & Whittier, 1994; Taylor, 2000). Lessons learned, confidence gained, and protest strategies from experiences with a particular identity are used to help in other identity-based work. Though useful, intersectional mobilization does not account for multiple identities to be centered in movements for racial equality simultaneously (Terriquez, 2015).

It appears that though intersectional mobilization leaves room for multiple identities to be present in a specific movement, this does not account for a movement to center intersectional identities along with the topic of activism. In essence there is no specific discussion around how overarching issues impact intersections of identity differently. Therefore Black women are left to center their Blackness only in racial justice movements or their gender in women's movements, which only addresses one component of oppression they must endure.

Scholars (Brown, Ray, Summers, & Fraistat, 2017; Crenshaw, Ritchie, Anspach, Gilmer, & Harris, 2015; Rickford, 2016) have begun to discuss how Black

women have been left out of discussions around BLM. Though this was not the intent, progressively the issues pertaining to Black, queer Black, and trans Black women disappeared from popular conversations about the movement. When #Sayhername arose to call attention to the number of Black women who were killed due to police violence, little focus was given to this activism and the movement almost fizzled out of view. However, the syphoning out of Black women from the larger BLM movement reiterates the stronghold on singular identity and patriarchal ideas that center on males that activist platforms seem to take on (Brown, Ray, et al., 2017; Rickford, 2016).

Black men at the center of conversations around hardships from racism are not a new idea. Socialization practices for Black women may have trained them to believe they are not as impacted by racism as their Black male peers (Brown, Blackmon, Rosnick, Griffin-Fennell, & White-Johnson, 2017). Brown, Blackmon, et al. (2017) discussed that some Black parents may have sent messages to their daughters that Black men experience more marginalization from racism. A possible increase in downplaying racism towards Black women happened after the Trayvon Martin killing in 2014, as parents' worries were heightened around Black men being targets of racial profiling (Brown, Blackmon, et al., 2017; Thomas & Blackmon, 2015). In turn, there is a perception that Black women should be supportive of Black men and act as their protectors due to their racial oppression (Brown, Blackmon, et al., 2017; Nash, 2008). Protection also means Black women should preserve and/or maintain Black men's masculinity at all costs without regard to personal risk (Brown, Ray, et al., 2017; Nash, 2005). With these ingrained messages, it is possible the prescribed structures of

social interaction come into play within activist spaces. Thus, Black women's issues are not at the forefront, as it becomes important to first protect Black men.

The invisibility of Black women's collective experiences with racism and/or sexism in race-based spaces may be a by-product of this behavior. Moreover, understanding the complexity of intersectional identities that Black women may hold may also be occurring. This research further investigated this concept by examining Black women's experiences with intersectionality in race-based activist spaces.

Significance of the Study

Contemporary activism has neglected to develop into multi-issue or multi-identity platforms. Therefore Black women, experiencing both racism and sexism in unison, struggle to find space within activism that honors their full selves in the fight for justice. Through this research I sought to understand the experience of Black women doing race-based activism to learn how they navigate other oppressed identities against their salient racial identity. In so doing, attention will be brought to the continued invisibility of Black women that transpires in racial justice spaces when central focus rests on Black men. hooks (2014) noted, "No other group in America has so had their identity socialized out of existence as black women. We are rarely recognized as a group separate and distinct from Black men or present part of the larger group 'women' in this culture" (p. 7).

Patton, Crenshaw, Haynes, and Watson (2016) further discussed that Black women's experiences are often syphoned out of discussion even though things like police brutality and legal regulations are enacted on Black women similarly as Black males. The authors also linked skewed support around issues of racism to the

conflation of issues of Black people and Black men as being the same, thus minimizing the issues of Black women.

When looking at the experiences of Black women on college campuses, their engagement in student activities provides an additional layer to their experiences. Some Black women college students have found a safe place and support through involvement in student leadership. These spaces provide social networks that help with progression through racial tension in the college environment (Domingue, 2015). Student organizations have also been a space for activism to flourish (Linder & Rodriguez, 2012; Quaye & Harper, 2007). Therefore, it is possible that similar groups geared toward doctoral students could provide a similar avenue of support. Literature (Gildersleeve, Croom, & Vasquez, 2011) has expressed the need for support avenues to retain doctoral students throughout the educational journey. Thus, considering how involvement in activism has supported Black women doctoral students while also adding frustration may shed light on additional hardships that may impede their journey to graduation.

The experiences of Black women, their social identities, and the oppression they experience have not been validated within college campus activities (Domingue, 2015; Linder & Rodriguez, 2012). Thus, focusing on this issue is imperative to support Black women on college campuses as they progress through academia and navigate their varying social identities. Studies have also discussed the invisibility of Black women (Purdie-Vaughs & Eiback, 2008; Schug, Alt, & Klauer, 2015; Sesko & Biernat, 2010; Thomas, Dovidio, & West, 2014) in general everyday contexts. If the experiences of Black women are also invisible within support networks on college

campuses for Black women doctoral students, the resulting impact on these women could be detrimental.

Previous studies I conducted examining Black women involved in race-based activism used the populations of college students, undergraduate degree holders, and student affairs professionals. Overall, each population seemed to struggle with some component of the research in regard to fully answering questions. College students were still forming their own understanding of their identity, both around social categories and activist identity. Undergraduate degree holders' answers were more complex and thorough depending on how long they were engaged in activism and/or depending on the type of activist activity they chose to participate in. Student affairs professionals, the group with the most in depth conversations, centered most of their activism in connection with their roles within the institution and were not always able to separate their personal experience with work. These collective realizations seemed to suggest another population might be most appropriate for this dissertation study. Thus, I chose to explore doctoral students under the assumption that this population straddles the identities of student and professional and may be able to provide a larger scope because of their current experiences.

Additionally there is little to no literature analyzing doctoral students' engagement in activism; however, undergraduates are often explored (Guiffrida, 2003; Harvell, 2010; Hurtado, 1992; Linder & Rodriguez, 2012; Quaye & Harper, 2007; Rhoads, 1997, 2016; Sorey & Gregory, 2010). Literature exists that mentions doctoral students and activism (Berger et al., 2013; Home, San Mathews, Detrie, Burke, & Cook, 2001; Platt, 1995), but they may not be the focus of the work. This reconfirms the need to examine this understudied population with these specific criteria.

The purpose of this research was to discover how Black women doctoral students experience their intersectionality when engaged in race-based activism. The collective research questions ask:

Q1 How do Black women doctoral students involved in race-based activism understand their intersectional identities?

Q2 How do Black women doctoral students involved in race-based activism believe their intersectional identities and the social injustices that impact these identities are addressed in current race-based activism?

Researcher Reflection

As I began working on this research I progressively gained a sense of fear in completing this work. Though I strongly believe I have identified a gap in the literature and purpose compelling arguments, I cannot help but worry about the possible self-inflicted isolation I may be imposing on myself. This work challenges culturally held ideas of relationships between Black men and women. I have long been told from figurative aunties and other socialization gatekeepers that Black women protect Black men, present a united front, and keep private problems out of public consumption. However, in an effort to be authentic and honor my internal turmoil, I felt it my responsibility and academic contribution to delve into this topic. Black women have always been important in activism and advocacy for all Black people. Often their work has leveraged fights for justice and provided much needed energy for pushes toward change. However, whether discussing issues among women generally or Black people specifically, it seems the nuance of dealing with oppression is not acknowledged among multiple identities.

I believe I am an activist at heart. This identity has materialized in some nontraditional ways, culminating in this dissertation. Through processing my personal

feelings about the lack of focus of Black women in mainstream conversations of BLM, I arrived on this subject. This discovery pushed me to do a historical literature review during my coursework. That work pointed me to numerous reduplications of this concept in several activist spaces, both in historical and contemporary ways. As I continued to gather sources and edit my work, I found myself becoming enraged that this has not changed over time. The continued neglect and silencing around the issues of Black women is exhausting and hurtful.

As I embarked on the final pieces of my doctoral journey I found myself wrestling with my academic self and my personal self. My academic self is excited about shedding light on an under-researched issue and using my dissertation to start uncovering the nuances of this dynamic and pushing for challenging conversations. However, I worry that I am painting myself as a "man-hater." Often I feel like the Black community is heavily situated in conservative views and traditionalist ideas. These morals and values do not leave much room for interrogation of sexism, classism, or privilege. Further conversations that call for an exploration of privilege among those with oppressed identities, such as with Black men, often get labeled as "anti-Black men." Therefore, my work and I could be described in this way, which is not ideal.

Like most Black women, I have been socialized by messages about what are the ways to attract a male partner. All these pieces align with ideas about not calling out Black men in public, upholding their masculinity, and having a united front. In essence, I feel I am breaking these rules by discussing an intimate issue academically. This is further compounded as I may address ways Black men have been harmful to

Black women and have been a significant oppressor. Hard to hear in any form, but once written down becomes immortalized.

Still, I am continually plagued with the question, If not me, then who? If not now, then when? I feel called to this work. I feel chosen to explore it, to examine and reexamine the literature, redefine knowledge, and add to the breadth of knowledge. But I am scared. That fear is not simple or irrational; it is rooted in evidence while pieces of this fear are wrapped in the unknown.

When I began this dissertation I believed I had adequately processed my own identity. As a person in my 40s, I thought I was done figuring myself out. However, as I delved deeper into this research through interviews, literature review, and data analysis, I discovered I was wrong. As I had hoped this work would be transformative for my participants, it was for me as well. I knew I would be changed after completing the culminating evaluation exercise of this degree and that I would evolve to a more confident mature scholar. I did not anticipate, however, that disagreeing with participant perspectives and finding solidarity and finding more questions than answers would also force me to truly figure out who I am.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The invisibility of Black women's intersectionality within race-based activism is a phenomenon that has been repeated throughout history. Much literature (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson, 2013; Crenshaw, 1991; Purdie-Vaughs & Eiback, 2008; Schug et al., 2015; Thomas et al., 2014) has called attention to the ways intersectional identity creates a unique experience that is often misunderstood. To create a framework for the ways this has historically materialized, the literature outlined in this chapter provides a broad scope of the experiences and challenges of Black women being erased or minimized in fights for justice. This is done by giving a summary of a few examples of this phenomenon throughout history and today.

I begin by setting the tone by briefly exploring Black student activism and its spread throughout the development of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and moving to the rise of Black Power. Next, I examine the Black Campus Movement and the Black Power Movement area with discussion of the growth of Black student unions and the development of Black studies. Then, I explore how Black women experienced the women's movement and then move into Black queer marginalization. I then discuss how student affairs has been involved with activism on college campuses and how campus student activism plays a role in creating campus climate. Next, I further expand Black women's invisibility and conclude the chapter with the current state of Black student activism.

Black College Student Activism

There is a long history of students becoming engaged in justice seeking, with literature placing attention on activism during of the 1960s. Dedicated student activism has embraced local issues, campus concerns, and national injustices (Rhoads, 2016). The civil rights movement of the 1960s was significant in calling many students to bring their energy to the table to spark clear attention on the injustices faced by Black people (Rhoads, 2016).

The college student facilitated Montgomery lunch counter sit-ins, fighting against racially segregated restaurants, is one example of 1960 student activism (Rhoads, 2016). Primarily planned and carried out by students, the sit-ins spawned a shift in the ways in which demands for justice were sought (Flowers, 2005). Some believe the sit-ins were a spontaneous event, while others credit the move as a well-thought out plan executed by strong organized leadership and communication (Flowers, 2005). Although civil rights leaders of various organizations did not anticipate these protests, the sit-ins were seen as reenergizing and inspiring to these established organizations and a seminal moment for the movement (Flowers, 2005; Morris, 1981).

The Montgomery sit-ins were started by four male students from North Carolina Agriculture and Technical State University and sparked a string of similar events in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Alabama (Carson, 1981; Rhoads, 1997; Sorey & Gregory, 2010). This student activism bred more engagement as students gained insight from protests of the civil rights movement and began to push even more. The sit-ins grew to also include general picketing and boycotting of segregated

stores, sparking a change in the centering of politics for Black college students and set the compass for other students across the country (Carson, 1981; Rhoads, 1997).

Though much attention was placed on the Montgomery sit-ins and their four male organizers, both in history and contemporary discussions of the civil rights movement, the arrests of several women from Bennett College often goes unmentioned (Flowers, 2005). Many others in the community also participated in the protests but the nonexistent discussion of the foot soldiers of the movement is important (Flowers, 2005). These women were often involved with planning protests, supplying additional marchers, and providing supplies to assist in the sit-ins. Arrests of Bennett College women even reached 40% at this time. This erasure of the stories of the involvement of Black women during the sit-its and their significant and impactful work begins to chronicle a consistent theme of diminishing or eliminating Black women's labor. The work of men is not to be dismissed; however, the work of Black women was integral to the success and progression of activism during the civil rights movement.

In 1957 ministers, recognizing the influence of the church among Black communities, created the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). The SCLC's formation was the first time the church became a center of protest instead of organizations with just connections to the church (Morris, 1981). The group comprised of Black ministers hoped the newly formed Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) would become the student auxiliary group to their organization, but lead by adults (Carson, 1981; Gosse, 2005; Holsaert et al., 2010). At the height of the student sit-ins Ella Baker called a youth leaders conference, sponsored by the SCLC. Baker, then executive secretary of the SCLC, became leery of approaches to

civil rights with a central focus on leaders, especially fame motivated clergy (Houck & Dixon, 2009). At the conference Baker encouraged SNCC to remain independent and to not align with the clergy-dominated SCLC, recognizing their need for self-sufficiency (Carson, 1981; Gosse, 2005; Holsaert, et al., 2010; Houck & Dixon, 2009).

Baker's role with SNCC is significant because she became a mentor and organizer to the group, which paralleled and guided the group to new avenues. Baker believed that "we must cultivate leadership, not leaders" (Houck & Dixon, 2009, p. 246), a sentiment that was embraced by SNCC and was not common among other organizations at the time.

In turn, SNCC grew beyond sit-in protests and developed into an organization that was the hub of student activism, expanding to a sustainable movement that coordinated much of the southern protest activities, allowing more youth to come into the fold (Carson, 1981; Holsaert et al., 2010). Black students carved an important mark in civil rights efforts. Moving outside the perimeters of college campuses, many Black students had a personal charge to change their social circumstances for themselves and for Black people nationwide.

Black Campus Movement

As the fight for racial justice grew, other forms of action materialized to address the increasing disheartenment around making small incremental progression. Rising youth activist Stokely Carmichael publicly disagreed with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s insistence of a non-violent movement. Carmichael soon introduced the concept of Black Power in response to continued harassment by police of activists. He assured crowds that the slogan Black Power would become the new saying of SNCC. This would leverage Carmichael as ushering the new segment of liberation that was

Black militancy (Joseph, 2003). Dr. King separated himself from the new slogan; however, Carmichael became lifted as the voice for an emerging group of Black radicals (Joseph, 2003).

Additionally, the continued violence of beatings and killings of civil rights leaders added tension. The changing times sparked a sense of social awareness, activist desires and consciousness among college students. Emerging knowledge of Black power coupled with the desire for new tactics to racial justice encouraged Black students to redefine assimilationist notions of integration (Biondi, 2012).

Eventually the call for racial justice spilled throughout campuses with Black students wanting curriculum that aligned with Black culture and the developing identity of Black students (Biondi, 2012). These demands were coupled with other campus concerns, but all focused on changing the campus dynamic for Black students. Much activism raised concerns about marginalized identities having welcoming and accepting spaces on college campuses. Spanning from advancing curricular changes around identity-based academic courses to equity and access concerns, student activism continued to push institutions to supporting marginal voices (Rhoads, 1997).

Feelings of isolation and tokenism were spreading through many institutions of higher learning when the Black Campus Movement evolved. During this period Black students took measures to make institutional change including shifts to academic curriculum (Biondi, 2012; Rogers, 2008; Rojas, 2007). Many students integral in providing organization for various actions during the Black Campus Movement were armed with lessons from involvement with SNCC (Biondi, 2012). Their education in activist movements prepared them for the campus battles ahead (Biondi, 2012).

Black Student Unions

As the Black Power movement began to take off, the number of Black students enrolling in predominantly White institutions also increased with many of these students adopting the messages of Black unity and Black pride, central to Black Power movement ideology (Williamson, 1999). With increasing Black student enrollments came increasingly hostile campus environments. In an effort to protect, nurture, and support Black students around issues both on campus and nationally, Black students unions began to appear (Williamson, 1999).

Though it is not clear what institution dawned the first Black student union, literature does give nods to schools such as the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign and Rutgers University as forming such organizations. Still, all organizations regardless of establishment date had similar goals in mind: forcing institutional change and supporting Black students (Williamson, 1999). Students felt alienated and isolated at predominantly White institutions and often did not feel free to participate in established activities and organizations on campus. Thus, to obtain needed resources and support, Black students staged several demonstrations fighting discrimination. Also at this time the growing racial consciousness of Black people due to the Black Power movement influenced many of these students. With this fever, students began forming Black student groups with varying names. These Black student unions formed with the purpose of creating unity, celebrating Black culture, and encouraging institutional change (Williamson, 1999). As Black student unions became more established, their agenda to create institutional change included demanding recruitment and retention of Black students and Black faculty and the development of Black studies departments (Williamson, 1999).

Though the growth of Black student organizations became the hub for activism against racial discrimination, they were also the breeding ground for sexist patriarchal assertions (Biondi, 2012). As Black students embraced the ideas of Black liberation, which was aligned with militant ideas, male dominated leadership was encouraged. Thus, student groups began to insist on mirroring this notion in their organizations, often attempting to push women out of already held positions.

These ideas also coincided with the release of the Moynihan report that indicated the rise in female-led Black families, which Moynihan suggested was not natural and an indicator of their economic downturn (Biondi, 2012). In kind, Black feminism rose in response to the report. However, Black nationalism increased simultaneously, an ideology that believed traditional gender roles were necessary for racial uplift (Biondi, 2012).

In student organizations these feelings of needing Black male leadership did not easily become commonplace, having some women students standing in opposition. However, male students continued to push, saying that men should be in leadership roles during heavy activism as it was their duty to protect the women as a way to "speak for the Black family of students" (Biondi, 2012, p. 27).

It could be argued that the desire to center on Black men in activism was done for chivalrous reasons. Still, all women did not necessarily welcome these ideas. It would also seem that Black men were threatened by sentiments expressed in the Moynihan report and fought to reclaim their masculinity, which meant holding fast to oppressive chauvinistic ideas. Unfortunately, this perception seems to foreshadow a continuing struggle between Black men and Black women for public acknowledgment of their humanity and leadership. However despite these tensions, the activism racing

through college campuses by Black students forced institutions of higher education to examine their thinking around academic offerings and perspectives, ushering a reformation of racial concepts in these institutions (Rogers, 2012).

Development of Black Studies

The creation of a Department of Black Studies was the first demand on a 10-point list issued by Black students to the San Francisco State College president in 1968 (Rogers, 2008; Rojas, 2007). Days later the Third World Liberation Front, another formed student group, issued different demands including the creation of the School of Ethnic Studies (Rojas, 2007). Though the president supported the creation of both Black and ethnic studies, other demands were not met. Requests for the appointment of trained sociologist Nathan Hare as department chair of the Department of Black Studies and the reinstatement of student and Black Panther George Murray were declined. Without the full acceptance of all demands, a lengthy strike was ignited followed by numerous negotiations. The final result was the creation of the Department of Black Studies (Rojas, 2007).

The few years after the third world strike, approximately 120 Black studies degree programs were created, with several additional connected research centers and non-degree programs following shortly (Rojas, 2007). The sentiment that colleges were ready for change and the energy of the 1970s propelled Black studies forward. However, in the late 1970s Black studies experienced a decline due to the overall financial woes of higher education. The blows continued into the 1980s when declining student interest occurred as the importance of activism of the civil rights and Black Power beliefs subsided (Rojas, 2007). Some programs suffered during this time, especially if the external problems were coupled with internal problems. Resistance

from hostile administrators and/or fluctuating enrollments sparked funds to some programs to be reallocated, causing units to close. Still, many programs were able to withstand the changing times through to today.

The reality that student activism sparked the development of an academic discipline that previously did not exist speaks to the desire for students to gain representation. This demand bridged both the desire to be represented in numbers with the hiring of Black faculty to support the program, but also representation in the curriculum. Students' engagement in their own education was a fierce commitment, much leading to police violence (Biondi, 2012). Black student activism took a substantial shift from peaceful protests of the sit-ins of the 1960s to the more aggressive tactics of the late 1960s and 1970s (Biondi, 2012; Williamson, 1999). Students now were doing whatever they felt was necessary to advance the movement and get demands met.

It is unclear if the student activism for the purpose of pushing Black studies also included a need for specific issues pertinent to Black women. Rojas's (2007) work did not seem to specifically address Black women's involvement. This lack of specificity would seem to suggest that during the inception of Black studies focus rested on Blackness as a whole. However, this oversight continues the trail of minimization of Black women's impact during this time in activism.

Women's Movement

Some believe the springboard into the women's liberation movement began with the memo "Sex and Caste" written by two White women, Hayden and King, involved with the SNCC (Baxandall, 2001). Though not active participants in the women's liberation movement, the Hayden and King work in the civil rights

movement pushed them to write the document. However, they did not believe a women's movement could develop and suggested best efforts should be put behind issues of war, poverty, and race (Baxandall, 2001). A group did not materialize from the memo, but it did communicate what many women were feeling. When women's groups did form there was separation between mostly White spaces and Black women's spaces. However, media attention centered White groups painting the picture that early feminism was solely White (Baxandall, 2001). Many (Baxandall, 2001; hooks, 2014) have noted that women of color were involved with the movement from its birth. In particular, several groups that specifically addressed Black women's concerns were active during the 1970s. Many of these groups addressed single mothers, poverty, and self-help. These objectives were not aligned with what White middle-class women's groups were doing at the time (Baxandall, 2001), which may explain their limited mainstream exposure.

What is evident is that low participation of Black women in mainstream organizations during feminist iterations was partially due to their lack of holistic approaches that understood and examined the multiple oppressions facing Black women (Marbley, 2005). Loyalty to the Black community may have also kept Black women from participating in feminist groups. Black women may have held their allegiance with racial justice, as many believed feminism would create divisiveness among Black people (Marbley, 2005).

Despite desires to both address racism and sexism, Black women were urged to side with either their womanhood or their Blackness, sending their full lived experience to the sidelines (Marbley, 2005). Though it is clear that Black women were involved with gender specific activism during the time of the women's liberation

movement, their activities have not always been included in the documentation of what is considered part of the movement. Nor were Black women's contributions in mainstream liberation movement actions largely discussed or acknowledged.

In fact, Turner (2010) stated that during the campus movements of the 1960s women were positioned to secondary roles. Turner (2010), however, goes further by specifying that this limitation was especially true for White women, noting that,

> The centrality of civil rights to other forms of campus protest made it all but inevitable that people would eventually see an analogy between women's marginalization and the oppression of Black people, and the civil rights movement and the New Left thus give birth to the women's liberation movement. (p. 271)

This statement proposed both that Black women did not also have a similar secondary role in activism and that they were to be corralled to the collective lump of Black people as a whole. Further, this neglects a more nuanced conversation about the role power, privilege, race, and gender play in complicating Black women's experience.

Additionally, conflict between White women and Black women on the encompassing nature of feminism highlighted the misunderstanding of experience. Breines (2002) noted that Black women's critique of White women was their limited analysis of women's subordination as only about gender. For Black women this miss was an indicator of the underassessment of intersectionality in their lives, saying race, class, and gender had a collective impact.

For instance, the juxtaposition of middle-class status coupled with respectability politics has dictated acceptable Black behavior, which is heterocentric and anti-hypersexuality (Hornsby, Aldridge, & Hornsby, 2005). Respectability encouraged Black people to reflect proper public behavior that was aligned with middle class White ideas that pushed traditional views of gender roles, education,

employment, family dynamics, sexuality, and child bearing (Chappell, Hutchinson, & Ward, 2004). Further, there have been harsher cultural restrictions around sexuality on Black women than Black men, which were seen during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s (Hornsby et al., 2005). This disparity in experience continued throughout history and further describes the plight of Black women.

Black Queer Marginalization

Similar isolation is wedged among Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons within the Black community. Generally, there is a centering of Blackness as most significant leaving larger pushes for LGBT rights as secondary to seeking racial equality. This is due to mainstream LGBT issues not widening to include intersectionality and solely focusing on issues most pressing for White LGBT persons (Moore, 2010). Missing from the common rhetoric of LGBT issues, Black LGBT persons' navigation of multiple identities is invisible to some within the Black community (Moore, 2010). More isolation is created when Black LGBT persons downplay their sexuality in Black spaces to appease perceptions of acceptable behavior (Moore, 2010). Additionally, the belief that linked fate (Dawson, 1995; Dawson & Bobo, 2009; Mitchell-Walthour, 2013), the good of the Black community outweighs one's own personal interests, may push Black LGBT people to prioritize racial equality (Moore, 2010).

Purdie-Vaughs and Eiback (2008) suggested that Black gay men's experiences parallel the eraser of Black women's contributions, noting that the "intersection of race and sexuality marginalizes the historical contributions of black gay men" (p. 384). The authors (Purdie-Vaughs & Eiback, 2008) go further with this idea and noted, "in our culture to be African-American is to be heterosexual, and to be

homosexual is to be white, thus rendering African-American gay men invisible through the influence of heterocentrism and ethnocentrism, respectively" (p. 384).

Arguably however, we must consider that male privilege is still afforded to gay men as well as the ability to practice patriarchal norms. Thus, the overall experience is not completely aligned. Similarities occur in comparing the marginalization that accompanies Black queerness. For instance many Black queer persons along the gender spectrum have had their contributions extracted from history. Persons such as Marsha P. Johnson, Bayard Rustin, Zora Neale Hurston, and Bruce Nugent have all been minimized or deleted from historical accounts of major contributions in both the Black and LGBT communities.

However, another form of marginalization is present for Black LGBT persons and is situated in the formation of saliency around identity. Moore (2010) suggested that LGBT persons born before 1954 tend to keep Blackness as their main identity base due to their desire to support the advancement of the race. Black LGBT persons born in the 1960s through the 1970s developed identity amid public conversation around same-sex relationships and the human HIV/AIDS epidemic. This reality caused Black LGBT persons to urge their racial group to understand that possessing other salient identities was not a threat to the saliency of their blackness or commitment to the race (Moore, 2010). The perception of the need for a defense of multiple identities echoes that of Black women. Being faced with societal issues that specifically impact one's social identity is cause for heightened focus to address justice and self-care. Both Black women and Black LGBT persons were encouraged to center Blackness over other identity needs.

Student Affairs Involvement in Activism

During the upswing of student activism and protests in the 1960s students also began to understand the systems at play at their own institutions (Sorey & Gregory, 2010). Their increased insight perhaps encouraged more involvement on their campuses to enact change through formal mechanisms (Sorey & Gregory, 2010). Additionally, this involvement changed the perception administrators and faculty had of their students, now seeing them as motivated and invested (Gaston-Gayles, Wolf-Wendel, Tuttle, Twombly, & Ward, 2005; Sorey & Gregory, 2010).

The political climate of the 1960s also shifted the senior student affairs administrator role as the position became part of the university president's cabinet (Gaston-Gayles et al., 2005). The change was in response to the senior student affairs administrator becoming critical in crisis management incidents involving students. This gained student affairs a new level of recognition, changing the way student affairs related to other members of the campus community. Student affairs administrators became looked upon to deal with student dissent and provide resolution (Gaston-Gayles et al., 2005). This moved their roles from a pseudo-parental role to one that had student development as a central responsibility (Sorey & Gregory, 2010). However, some administrators were asked to be gatekeepers and protectors of the university charged with keeping the so-called order (Gaston-Gayles et al., 2005). This transpired in disciplinary action, but some administrators found ways to enforce rules while still centering the work on student development. Coupling consideration of a student's intent with the infraction allowed for multiple goals to be achieved within the judicial process (Gaston-Gayles et al., 2005). Additionally, staff supported students by helping to develop leadership skills that would aid them in their activist

fight but also helped them to learn how to make change and create new programs and initiatives on campus (Sorey & Gregory, 2010).

Today, administrators view the crux of their roles as student affairs administrators as supporting student development and nourishing their activist spirit (Chambers & Phelps, 1993; Rhoads, 1997). Students have the power to seamlessly navigate acts of resistance on campus and often are able to directly address concerns. Since faculty and staff are a part of the larger institutional administration, they risk their jobs if they challenge too aggressively (Sorey & Gregory, 2010). Thus, movement on campus issues may see a different trajectory due to student involvement and/or protest. However, the connection may be deeper. Faculty and staff may have the desire to support students as a way of preparing them to follow in their own activist footsteps (Kezar, 2010).

Involvement in activism on campus connects students both to the development of their own identity but also their affinity to the college (Guiffrida, 2003; Quaye & Harper, 2007). Many students who have marginalized identities come to campus with significant understanding of the oppression their community experience (Linder & Rodriguez, 2012). With this understanding students often are keenly in tune with injustices on campus and are apt to hold institutions to task on these concerns (Hurtado, 1992). The knowledge students bring helps educators charged with supporting these communities on campus with valuable information that guides their work to provide welcoming spaces on campus (Linder & Rodriguez, 2012).

Additionally, when students work with faculty connected to their activist involvement on campus, there is an impact to their own personal development (Kezar, 2010). Students connected to student organizations known for participation in activist

and advocacy work enhance their learning about various social justice issues and increase their desire to raise awareness across the campus community (Astin, 1993; Quaye & Harper, 2007).

Black Women's Invisibility

Black women's leadership and lived experience is impacted by the intersecting identities of race and gender (King, 1988; Simien, 2003). Together, the interlocking systems of racism and sexism create a compounding oppressive experience (Crenshaw, 1991). Black women navigate the complexity of intersecting identity that in turn impacts their participation and engagement in identity-based activist movements. For instance, difference in activist experience that was influenced by race, class, and gender was commonplace for Black women during the civil rights movement (Simien, 2003).

Black women have found themselves on the margins of discussions on both racial issues and women's issues as demonstrated in the civil rights and early feminist movements (Evans, 2015; hooks, 2000). Discussion about gender issues within racial justice movements were limited by concerns they would distract from the larger movement's success (Simien, 2003). In kind, Black women were rendered invisible in the women's liberation movement as White middle class women's concerns were centralized (Evans, 2015). The erasure of Black women's experiences with oppression is commonplace. Societal perceptions that all who identify as Black have similar experiences or all women deal with similar issues have created an assumption that oppression across an identity group looks the same (Purdie-Vaughs & Eiback, 2008; Schug et al., 2015).

Interestingly though, Black women have been integral in racial justice movements (Edwards, 2000; Horsford, 2012; Simien, 2003). During the civil rights movement many Black women acted as bridge-building leaders by connecting the community to the larger social movement acting as critical organizers and mobilizers (Alston & McClellan, 2011; Horsford, 2012; Robnett, 1996, 1997). For instance, there were some members of the Black community who were not instantly on board with the racial justice activism during the time. Black women often worked in the community and focused on individuals' social location to help convince them of the importance of the movement and gain their support (Robnett, 1997).

However, the work Black women did during this time was not applauded in the ways similar to Black male leadership. Gender roles of the time put Black men in positional leadership roles only. These men held positions such as director, while women were allowed to fill administrative roles (Robnett, 1996). In essence, Black men were the face of the movement, while Black women did the behind-the-scenes work (Barnett, 1993).

It appears the behavior of Black women in race-based activism has taken on a similar role in movements of today. For instance, current activism around the #BlackLivesMatter (BLM) movement, whose founders were three Black women, two of whom are Queer, has seemed to minimally recognize or completely erase the contributions of Black women, queer people, and transgender people in the movement (Lindsey, 2015; Taylor, 2016). Though this was not the original intent of the movement, it seems the media attention and community focus has defaulted to lifting the experiences of Black men over Black women (Garza, 2016; Rickford, 2016). Names like Michelle Cusseau, Gabriella Nevarez, Kathryn Johnson, Aura Rosser,

Natasha McKenna, Tanisha Anderson, and Sheneque Proctor all died due to police shooting or while in custody yet remain virtually unknown and did not receive rallies calling for justice in their deaths (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Locke, 2016).

Currently, there are no studies that explore why Black women's issues that connect to their intersectional identities are not situated in either race-based or gender-based activist platforms. Though there have been studies exploring Black women or women of color and activism (Harvell, 2010; Linder & Rodriguez, 2012; Rainey & Johnson, 2009) and studies that discuss how Black women were involved in activism during the civil rights movement (Barnett, 1993; Edwards, 2000; Horsford, 2012; Millner, 1996; Simien, 2003), no studies specifically look at why activist platforms seem to minimize how Black women are impacted by racism and sexism and how that impact is not centered in activist work. There is, however, new literature that has begun to address this phenomenon (Lindsey, 2015) though accompanying research has yet to appear.

In contemporary activism, a difference in Black women's and Black men's experience with police violence highlighted in media can be seen through the activism of the BLM movement. Despite that three Black women started the BLM movement, there has been little focus on the experience of Black women with police brutality and other violence. The #SayHerName, both a social media hashtag and physical document released in 2015, chronicled the Black women killed due to police violence. In particular, the document hoped to provide a more inclusive account of the call for racial justice that equally addressed all Black lives (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Though the #SayHerName (Crenshaw et al., 2015) campaign did ignite a redirection of conversation to acknowledge the ways Black women have suffered police brutality

and called attention to the numerous women that died from this violence, focus quickly shifted back toward Black males only. This renders the experience of Black women virtually invisible and perhaps creates the assumption that Black women deal with this violence, discrimination, and racism less than their male counterparts.

Despite their many contributions, Black women, and their interests, remain at the margins of race-based activist movements. Due to the intersecting identities of race and gender, Black women combat both racism and sexism. The multiple oppressive experiences endured by Black women are often left out of activist platforms and general understanding. Additionally, the discussion of sexism centers around the experience of White women, while racism is centered on the Black male experience (Purdie-Vaughs & Eiback, 2008; Schug et al., 2015; Sesko & Biernat, 2010; Thomas et al., 2014).

Current Black Student Activism

After the failed conviction of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of Trayvon Martin in 2012, the rise of BLM began to surface in an outcry to brutality enacted onto Black people (Garza, 2016; Lindsey, 2015; Locke, 2016; White, 2016). Soon, a spiral of incidents of police brutality impacting Black people continued to a crescendo with visual documentation on social media (White, 2016). As the numbers of Black deaths increased, accompanying protests ensued across the country. College campuses were not immune to this activism as college students joined local and national protests in hopes of seeing an end to the violence and the birth of productive resolution.

It would appear that these national protests ignited awareness among Black students on college campuses about the injustices they were facing on their own

campuses. Many Black students began to take their college administration to task sparking protests aimed at and calling attention to unfairness toward Black students. One of the most visible accounts of this activism was seen through the events happening at the University of Missouri as students called attention to yearlong demands for campus change (Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016; White, 2016). A call for the resignation for the university's president, Tom Wolfe, became centralized after students felt he did not adequately respond to several racial incidents that happened on campus (White, 2016). Tensions were heightened when Wolfe responded to protestors by remarking "systematic oppression is because you don't believe that you have the equal opportunity for success" (White, 2016, p. 87). Students, believing Wolfe's statement signaled a blame being placed on Black people for their own oppression, grew frustrated (White, 2016). What followed was a series of protests, which peaked when graduate student Jonathan Butler took on a hunger strike that was later reinforced by the Mizzou football team refusing to engage in any athletic activity until the president resigned (White, 2016). Additionally, student activists issued a list of demands entitled, *Concerned student, 1950*, giving nod to the first Black student to be admitted to the institution (Genius Media Group, Inc., 2015). This list of demands sought more Black faculty, retention programs, better mental health support, mandatory racial awareness and inclusive curriculum, and funding for social justice centers (Genius Media Group, Inc., 2015; Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016; White, 2016).

Similar situations sprang up on college campuses across the country with documented activism at such schools as Duke University, Oberlin College, and Yale University (Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016). Though these efforts mirrored past racial justice movements, they did not consider the intersections of identity. The blanket

focus of centering race by default embraces some issues that impact several communities within the Black diaspora. However, no movement talked about issues that addressed concerns faced by Black women only, Black LGBT persons, Black persons with disabilities, or any other spectrum of identity that would experience racial discrimination differently.

Though women, women of color, and queer people have always been central to fights against injustice, they have not always gotten recognition for their work (Cohen & Jackson, 2016). Cohen and Jackson (2016) noted what has shifted with the BLM movement is that these communities are not just doing the work, but they are part of leadership across several organizations, many of them Black liberation groups. An additional shift has also been the use a Black queer nationalist political framework that has informed organizations involved with BLM (Cohen & Jackson, 2016). However, this shift still does not account for intersectionality in issue platforms. Moreover, the experiences of Black women, their social identities, and the oppression they experience have not been validated within college campus activities (Domingue, 2015; Linder & Rodriguez, 2012).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter the involvement of Black women during key times of activism throughout history were outlined. First, I discussed Black college student activism starting with the lunch counter sit-ins and then the appearance of SNCC. Here, the emergence of a student run organization that was unlike other justice organizations of the time became significant during the civil rights movement with the support of Ella Baker. Next, the Black campus movement was introduced with the explanation of the development and growth of Black student unions and Black studies. Black student

unions became important for student activism, and the group's demands for support across the institution sparked the emergence of Black studies departments. Then, the literature moved to explore the women's movement noting that Black women's issues were not centered; instead, groups outside of mainstream recognition formed to discuss the reality for Black women's intersecting identities in connection to their gender identity. Next, Black queer marginalization highlighted parallels between Black women's experience and that of Black LGBT persons. Exploring how respectability politics and strong Black race salience has influenced both groups was shared. The chapter concluded with a discussion on how student affairs have been a support or hindrance to Black women in activism with a summary of the state of current Black student activism.

Specifically this literature review explored research that centered on the civil rights movement through contemporary times. Highlighted information argued that though Black women were integral in movements, their contributions and identities were often invisible. Contemporary activism still showcases that the lived experiences of Black women still remain hidden and unacknowledged. Collectively, the literature chronicles a case for examining how Black women are experiencing their intersectional identities when engaged in race-based activism and how they are impacted by those experiences.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I detail the framework used to establish a culturally centered focus in the research approach. Ultimately, I reject traditional ideas that center the dominant ideology and instead highlight Black women's perspectives and their accompanying cultural groundings. Throughout this chapter I build upon the goal of liberatory practices that bring forth the voice of Black women and acknowledge how this concentration provides a perspective often left invisible. First, a critical paradigm is used to empower people and uplift experience, providing space for different voices to be present. Next, the ontological perspectives of historical realism and an endarkened feminist epistemology are used (Dillard, 2000) to further shape the research process to center cultural ways of knowing. Then, continuing with the established focus, I used the collective theoretical frames of Black feminist thought and critical race feminism. Together these frameworks highlight historical perspectives of Black women's experiences and highlight how intersectionality complicates lived experiences and requires intentionality in research. Next, counterstory further connects the research frame by providing an avenue for Black women's stories to be expressed and uplifted as a valid expression of knowledge and communication that is culturally aligned. Then, my positionality addresses how my own life experiences have shaped my researcher identity and influences the research study. Finally research methods, data collection, and data analysis are discussed.

Critical Paradigm

Theorists and scholars interested in empowerment and transcending oppressive structures use critical paradigms as they focus on challenging the dominant narrative (Creswell, 2013; Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). Critical researchers in higher education are charged with interrogating systems, understanding the political nature of knowledge, and being closely connected to their theoretical perspectives (Jones et al., 2014). Previous studies conducted on this topic (Lenzy, 2019) have indicated that current activism does not provide space for Black women's intersectional identities to be considered in justice-seeking initiatives. Future research will aim to further discuss the absence of intersectionality in activism and seek recommendations to shift this practice. Examining how Black women navigate the simultaneous oppression they endure from racism and sexism provides a counter narrative of experience and provides insight to the lived experiences of Black women activists.

Critical theorists seek to critique and transform structures that create restrictions through engagement in critical thinking and conflict (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Additionally, the desire to reach transformative liberation is paramount and is the duty of the researcher to act as facilitator, often recognizing where movement is needed (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). However, it is also important that the participants themselves communicate the necessary evolutions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

As participants detailed their experiences in this study, it was important that they explained what their activist involvement meant to them. Through this research, I sought to understand how the participants made meaning of their engagement in activism, coupled with their various intersectional identities, and which identities were salient during this engagement. It was also important that participants were able to

note power structures at play that further impacted their experience. The power dynamics that are present dictate interaction with others as "epistemology points to the ways in which power relations shape who is believed and why" (Collins, 2000, p. 270). Collins' (2000) notion of this reality may speak to the lived experiences of Black women's intersectionality in activism and called for these voices to be at the forefront.

Ontology

Next, grounding this study in the ontological perspective of historical realism suggests that reality is influenced by values that include political, social, cultural, ethnic, economic, and gender ideas (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Scotland, 2012). Additionally, Scotland (2012) asserted that historical realism believes that social constructions are impacted by internal perceptions. More specifically, historical realists believe that "knowledge is both socially constructed and influenced by power relations from within society" (Scotland, 2012, p. 13). Using critical realism suggests that reality happens outside of the seer but that a participant's own understanding of the topic under study allows for unique views and perceptions (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013). Thus, framed with a critical paradigm, I considered through this study how these values have impacted the participants' understanding of their reality and how that reality brushes against oppressive structures.

Epistemology

Epistemology addresses how knowledge is derived (Jones et al., 2014). Dillard (2000) suggested using an endarkened feminist epistemology, which embraces knowledge developed from the historical roots of Black feminist thought. Additionally, endarkened feminist epistemology accounts for Black women's current and historical experiences with oppression, resistance, and intersectionality (Dillard,

2000). Thus, the culturally socialized reality of Black women has shaped concepts of knowledge. Moreover, the traditional ideas of disconnect between the researcher and participants are discarded for more African-centered cultural ideas (Dillard, 2000). Instead, the research relationship is shifted to one where the researcher has responsibility to the community under study (Dillard, 2000).

Feminists criticized the critical paradigm arguing that in its original conception critical theorists did not account for the realities of oppressed communities. Arguments also suggested that critical paradigm reduplicated the status quo (Scotland, 2012). However, coupled with an endarkened feminist epistemology, these shortcomings are eliminated.

Theoretical Framework

Understanding how Black women's engagement with oppressive systems has shaped their identity provides a window into their desires to seek justice. Academic thought pieces aiming to create documentation of Black women's experiences have chronicled much of this navigation and begin to give voice to lived experiences (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 2000). These ideas formulated into a theoretical framework ground the topic under study and provide background on how future research will progress.

Combahee River Collective Statement

In the early 1970s in Boston, Massachusetts, a Black feminist organization known as the Combahee River Collective (CRC) was formed to discuss collective group politics, raise consciousness, and saw "Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppression that all women of

color face" (Collective, 1977, p. 210). Moreover this group understood the complexity of how Black women's racial and gender identity made their experience unique. Specifically, the CRC noted that after involvement in movements of the 1960s and 1070s, their organization sought to be antiracist unlike White women's organizations of the time and antisexist unlike Black and White men's organizations (Collective, 1977).

The CRC argued that in activist spaces they "were told in the same breath to be quiet both for the sake of being ladylike and to make us less objectionable in the eyes of white people" (Collective, 1977, p. 211). This indicated the dichotomous nature of their experience, struggling with both racism and sexism collectively. Thus, the CRC believed it was their responsibility to work for Black women's liberation because they realized that "the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation is us" (Collective, 1977, p. 212). Further, the CRC noted they must still be in solidarity with progressive Black men due to the overarching situation of Black people. However, further communicating the uniqueness of intersectionality, the CRC reiterated that they "struggle together with Black men against racism, while we also struggle with Black men about sexism" (Collective, 1977, p. 213).

The statement released by the CRC begins to shed light on the experience of Black women and specifically indicates the components of that reality that are distinctive to Black women. The CRC statement maps out the commitments of those who call themselves Black feminists. It provides narrative to many challenges Black women experience and outlines a commitment to the action necessary to advance justice for Black women. This idea was advanced and expanded by Collins (2000) opening up the discussion to further explain what Black feminist thought encapsulates.

Collins' (2000) text specified the foundation of the overarching framework that guides thinking around the lived experiences of Black women.

Black Feminist Thought

Generally Black feminist thought speaks to the experiences and ideas of Black women and focuses on their perspective specifically (Collins, 1986). Central components of Black feminist thought are (a) it is impossible to separate the structural and historical circumstances from Black women's lives, (b) the unique reality of Black women has commonalities among Black women as a group, (c) the multiple identities of Black women will shape how shared commonalities manifest, and (d) the dimensions of this complex reality may not be obvious to Black women themselves (Collins, 1986).

At its core, Black feminist thought holds central that Black women's lived experience is influenced by the complexity of navigating multiple realities that are specific to Black women. However, what is unique to this theory is the focus on not only oppressive systems, but also empowerment and activism over these systems (Alinia, 2015). The key themes of Black feminist thought further explain its framework and provide a full scope of the theory and expresses additional context.

The meaning of self-definition and self-valuation. Black feminist thought stresses that it is important for Black women to define themselves for themselves, not relying on external definitions (Collins, 1986). Further self-valuation rejects externally derived images of Black womanhood and replaces it instead with authentic images. In turn these concepts urge a reimaging of the understanding of Black women and calls for discarding negative stereotypes, thus returning the power of humanity (Collins, 1986).

The interlocking nature of oppression. The interconnected nature of the systems of oppression of racism, sexism, and classism permeates the experience of Black women. Recognizing that each of these systems are linked and happen simultaneously provides insight to the complex nature of dehumanization that occurs (Collins, 1986).

The importance of Black women's culture. This last theme first stresses the need to redefine culture but more specifically addresses that there is not one common Black women's culture. Depending on the interplay of identities, culture will incorporate various items that may or may not be shared across the larger community (Collins, 1986).

The research under study incorporated concepts of Black feminist thought into the data analysis process by drawing attention to the historical and systemic oppression faced by participants that were shared. Specifically, the central components of the theory were integral in the understanding of the experiences communicated and allowed for links across the participants to be highlighted. Lastly, suggested recommendations provide liberatory practice that benefit current and future Black women doctoral students.

Interconnections.

Multiple jeopardy. A foundational component of Black feminist thought is the understanding of the experience of the simultaneity of oppression (Collins, 2000; Simien & Clawson, 2004). This is specifically important because of the accompanying realities that appear from these oppressions interacting together. Multiple jeopardy addresses this dynamic and further explains this concept (King, 1988). To fully grasp the depth of multiple jeopardy, it is important to first provide context. Originally the

approach of the race–sex analogy was used to shed light on the experience of women in the United States (King, 1988). Pinpointing commonalities among the experiences of Black people and women, the theory assumed racism and sexism were similar (King, 1988). It was believed that Black women's experience was captured among that of Black men or White women, ignoring Black women's experience with slavery, discrimination, and inequality (King, 1988). Multiple jeopardy seems to further expand the ideas of interlocking oppressions that occur in Black feminist thought (Collins, 2000). This concept is used here to provide additional background and link the ideas that have expanded this thinking.

Intersectionality. Black feminist thought call for exploring and understanding the interconnected nature of oppression and draws on the ideas of intersectionality (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality speaks to the links of oppression among race, gender, sexuality, and nation. Thus, stating that these individual oppressions cannot be viewed alone, but instead must be examined collectively to understand the additional depth of injustice that is created in unison (Collins, 2000). Intersectionality furthers the ideas expressed in Black feminist thought by explaining the entangled simultaneous oppression faced by Black women, racialized sexism, and sexualized racism (Carastathis, 2014). Moreover intersectionality reiterates not creating a hierarchy of oppression, but rather focusing on the relationship of oppression working together.

Black feminist thought provided a solid grounding for my research because it specifically addresses the concept of intersectionality and Black women's accompanying oppressions. My research around Black women's intersectionality and its recognition and presence in race-based activism centers around how seeking justice

in race-based spaces has centered on race oppression in a narrow view. The experiences of Black women and how the intersections of racism and sexism influence their lived experiences provides additional nuance often left out of race-only discussions. Black feminist thought seeks to address this by centering intersectionality and activism supporting the simultaneous oppression experienced.

Collectively multiple jeopardy and intersectionality are used in both the formulation of interview questions and the data analysis for this study. Questions and analysis uncover the experience of participants' intersectional identities within race-based activism in which they have engaged. Pointedly I sought to understand the intersections of their identity that are the most salient for them and how race-based spaces have or have not acknowledged those identities through specific activist activities.

Critical Race Feminism

The research was also grounded in a critical race feminist (CRF) perspective. A CRF perspective speaks to the anti-essentialist experience of women of color and touches on the oppression faced by both racism and sexism collectively (Wing, 1997). Further CRF perspective speaks to the damage imposed on women of color by navigating both a patriarchal and racist system by touching on the power dynamics imposed by each (Wing, 1997). A CRF perspective also allows for analysis of data to expose race, class, and gender dynamics impacting the experience of women of color.

Originally coined by Professor Richard Delgado, CRF focuses on the rights and legal status of women of color globally (Wing, 1997). Developing from critical race theory and critical legal studies, CRF goes further than the basic principles found among both (Berry, 2010). Materializing in the 1970s, critical legal studies appeared

from a movement of mostly White male legal academics. Critical legal studies were attractive because it challenged ideas of the impartiality of oppressive laws that targeted women and minorities. However, many began to believe that critical legal studies did not include the voices and experiences of women of color and White women (Wing, 1997).

This belief added to the development of critical race theory. Underpinnings of critical race theory can be found in Derrick Bell's work, but truly emerged in 1989, (Wing, 1997). It was believed that the civil rights movement had become stalled and a push began for an expansion of the discourse. However, women of color felt left out of the discussion as it was assumed that the experiences of women of color were the same as their male counterparts (Wing, 1997).

Further, feminist ideas during this time were focused on the experiences of White middle and upper class women. Though the concept of a patriarchal society was centered in this movement, it left out how race differently shapes its effects. This in turn leaves out how these intersectional dynamics significantly impact women of color specifically (Wing, 1997). Wing (1997) noted, "fundamental to Critical Race Feminism is the idea that women of color are not simply white women plus some ineffable and secondary characteristic, such as skin tone, added on" (p. 3). Critical race theory focuses on the multiple oppressions faced by women of color, pinpointing that there is no single voice or single experience among them. This anti-essentialist thought leaves room for the plethora of narrative central to CRF analysis.

A CRF perspective then still incorporates all the tenets of critical race theory but also provides space for in-depth understanding of the unique and complex

experiences of women of color. This incorporates the intersections of race, class, and gender not considered in previous theoretical frameworks.

The ideas that Black women experience both racism and sexism simultaneously is weaved throughout both Black feminist thought and CRF. The slight divergence comes from CRF's assertion that there is not one essential experience among women of color. For me, this distinction clarifies the idea that commonality and shared experiences do not negate the individual impact that wrestling with these experiences have on each woman's identity. However, together Black feminist thought and CRF provide an all-encompassing outlining of experience. Using the two concepts in union allowed for depth in analyzing the data.

Additionally I used CRF as a way to provide additional analysis for multiple racial and/other ethnic identities to be present among the Black women interviewed. It is possible that participants may have multi-racial and/or multi-ethic identities that are situated within a Black identity. I do not want to miss this reality for my participants, which provides another layer to the topic of study. In a previous study I conducted, one participant discussed her Brazilian heritage. This lens added to the participants' understanding of their Blackness and impacted how other Black people viewed her in race-based activism. Thus, CRF's tenet of anti-essentialism creates space for this narrative and influenced data analysis.

Story as Narrative Methodology

Counterstory, birthed from the theoretical framework of critical race theory, aims to tell the story of those that have not been told, overlooked, or misunderstood (Jones et al., 2014; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). First, it is important to provide background of the key principles that are found within counterstory to fully illuminate

its work. Specifically, critical race theory throughout all parts of the research process focuses on race and racism (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). However, critical race theory also posits that the interplay of race, gender, and class connect to create a unique experience for persons of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Challenging the dominant narrative that excludes the interconnectedness of oppression, critical race theory offers a different story that acknowledges the lived truth of experience for people of color (Pillow, 2003; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Thus, counterstory as a methodology aims to elevate the stories of persons of color to give voice to the reality of navigating the complexity of racism, sexism, and classism concurrently.

Pillow (2003) noted that race-based methodologies and epistemologies like critical race theory, Black feminism, and others highlight dialogue that aims to bring forth social change. Challenging the status quo of knowledge production, these practices suggest different and culturally appropriate ways of executing knowledge generation (Pillow, 2003). Still, race-based methodologies go one step further by calling attention to the embracement of the multiple identities of persons of color while also rejecting essentialism (Pillow, 2003).

Counterstory

Drawing on the traditions of African American and Native American cultures, counterstory aligns with historical ideas of storytelling. Stories allow the teller and audience to reflect on past memories and shared ancestry (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Trevino, Harris, & Wallace, 2008). Through the lens of a critical race analysis, counterstory retells the narrative of experiencing multiple oppressions. Therefore, by honoring cultural perspectives, counterstory tells another narrative that exposes a truth and complexity that is a specific and direct account of the multiplicity of the lived

experiences of people of color. Delgado (1989) acknowledging the liberatory function and healing properties of story, stated they act "as a means of psychic self-preservation" and "as means of lessening their own subordination" (p. 2436). Therefore, I used counterstory to align my research with providing a space for participants to reflect, heal, and give voice to the pain and joy of their lived experiences.

Though counterstory has been widely used (Martinez, 2014; Matias, 2012; Milner & Howard, 2013; Morgan, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) throughout research and literature in connection with critical race theory, there are not outlined specific processes to executing a counterstory. In lieu of prescribed structure, I incorporated several influences that aimed to provide additional guidance. In the next section, I expand on the incorporation of the influences of testimonio (Beverley, 2000; Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012) and testify (Baszile, 2008). Additionally in the data collection section I will detail the use of specific tools that bring forth narrative, which when woven together with testimonio and testifying, create a descriptive puzzle that illuminates the distinct reality of the participants.

Additional Influences

Testimonio. To further situate my work with intentionality, political ties, and liberatory practices, this research utilized influences of testimonio (Beverley, 2000; Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012; Saavedra & Pérez, 2012). Testimonio can be described as a qualitative expression of experiences with oppression that is steeped in intentional political solidarity (Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012). Common approaches used in testimonio include interviews with specific attention situated on power dynamics, relationship, and empowerment. Warner (1998) discussed using testimonio

in working with refugees. Special attention was given to not causing additional victimization as well as encouragement of voluntary testimonies. It is imperative that study participants do not feel obligated to share their stories, but instead share them without coercion (Warner, 1998). To avoid this, participants were told repeatedly that their participation was voluntary and not required (Warner, 1998). Throughout the research, the author affirmed feelings shared and was engaged in the process with participants and communicated advocacy for the participants' needs and concerns (Warner, 1998).

Significantly important is the emphasis on the telling of experience with injustices and the impact they have had on one's life (Huber, 2009). Though there is not an all-encompassing definition of testimonio, it adds additional nuance that considers the social and political climate that is present among experience (Huber, 2009).

I find connection and alignment with Latinx women's experiences and recognize their similarity with Black women's cultural ideas, which seem to parallel my own cultural understanding. Further, in order to account for the multicultural history of Blackness, I believe it was important to consider how participants may hold strong identities that incorporate several cultural communities. Testimonio is described by Reyes and Curry Rodríguez (2012) "as a legacy of reflexive narratives of liberation" (p. 525). Therefore, the research aimed to uplift participants sharing their resistance against oppressive structures and seeking self-advocacy. Further, to account for intersectionality and multiple oppressions, I sought to use testimonio to account for additional cultural influences that may be present for the Black women in my study (Saavedra & Pérez, 2012).

Testify. Baszile (2008) discussed that "testimony or the act of bearing witness to and thus working through trauma has been the primary way oppressed peoples have been able to tell their stories" (p. 253). In essence, the testimony allows the hearer in simultaneous reflection to understand the pain experienced by the teller. Acting as historic spectacles, the testimony provides the worldview of the teller, thus shaping our perspectives (Baszile, 2008). Others express that story is the way for personal experience to connect with culture to create a particular social understanding (Bell, 2003). In turn, the social knowledge created may be communicated through a testimony of experience, forming another aspect of counterstory (Baszile, 2008).

Baszile (2008) suggested that critical race testimony is another form of counterstorytelling, where one's reasoning abilities are contingent on having intertwining personal understandings of identity that influence our overall performance of self. Though there are not specific techniques employed for critical race testimony, it stresses the use of autobiographical voice. Specifically, it rejects White supremacist, heteronormative ideas by using story to allow for feelings to emerge before reasoning commences (Lake, 2016).

I first became familiar with the term testify through the cultural tradition of Black churches. Rooted in Christian perspectives, testifying entails publicly sharing experiences of overcoming hardships through the belief in God. Though testifying has its roots in Christianity, it was not my intent to couch this work within the realms of religious doctrine. I wished to make sure all faith and spiritual practices could be expressed throughout the research study. However, I wanted to center the concepts of publicly addressing injustice and seeking liberation. Further, I would be remiss to not

discuss how spirituality and/or religion in multiple ways have been powerful for Black women in navigating oppressive experiences.

Additionally, testifying as it is used here does not align with the idea of testifying in the American court system. Where testifying in a court of law suggests that persons are innocent until proven guilty, I reject the concept of stories needing to be proven. Instead I suggest that participants' truth is theirs to navigate and communicate to others in the ways that best connects with them. Often the desire to qualify and quantify experiences propels the focus on concrete concepts that can be precisely measured. However, stories, particularly how they impact us individually, are never structured, neat, or clean. They are alternatively messy and non-linear. Testifying as I used it in my research simply calls for a retelling of experience in the ways that are authentic and real for the orator.

Overall, I connected with counterstory with the interwoven components of testimonio (Beverley, 2000; Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012) and testifying (Baszile, 2008) because of the deep cultural roots of storytelling. Using story in my academic research is an act of resistance. Often there are parameters placed on who provides knowledge and how it is formed and brought into public knowledge. These ideas are wrapped in dominant perspectives of what is correct and worthy of public consumption. Rejecting views that the ushers of information and new perspective cannot be culturally bond, I intended to break this rigidity. The intentional narrative shift centers the voices of oppressed persons and recognizes them as the experts of their own experience. Further, just as we uphold certain theologians and philosophers as preservers of social knowledge, I wished to uplift the voices of my community to the same level of respect while also honoring their unique cultural stories. Lastly,

through storytelling the teller is able to reflect on the experience that is being shared. Through the use of intentional tools discussed in the data collection section, throughout the interview process I provided a chance for participants to process their stories in ways that were previously inaccessible.

Researcher Role and Positionality

My intersectional identities impact my lived experience and significantly influence the way I come to my research. I identify as a cisgender, plus-sized, spiritual, middle-class raised Black woman. The cultural capital I have gained from these experiences coupled with the oppression that is endured as a result of some of these identities has shaped my worldview. The complexity of navigating a world that was not designed for me, that suggests I should assimilate to the dominant paradigm, has made me continuously question and calculate my performance of my identity. I am plagued with deciding which oppression I am facing; racism, sexism, size-ism, classism, or some other ism. In reality a montage of oppression acting in unison is more accurate. For me, every situation is guided by this understanding.

However, I would say my most salient identity has always been my Blackness. Though I have always known I was a woman, what this meant to me was not always clear. Not until my 30s did I find myself being able to fully embrace my identity as a woman. This was in large part due to being taught by family and society that race trumped everything. The oppression Black people have faced at the hands of racist oppression and its impact has permeated every action of my life and still does to this day. Lessons of, you have to work twice as hard to be half as good and that's what it means to be Black, were on a constant repeated track in my head. This track played so much in fact that it overpowered my ability to always recognize my oppression as a

woman. I knew being a Black woman meant protecting Black men at all costs, having loyalty to Blackness by always presenting a united front, and constantly seeking racial justice. Still, I did not have understanding of my womanhood, separate and apart from being Black.

When I reached the threshold of getting up there in age in relation to the ideal marriage timeline was when the reality of the oppression I felt as a woman began to surface. I found myself being frustrated at the assumption that I needed to have a Black male partner and have children before the decade of my 30s was over. For some reason, this anger was a light switch, and I became more in tune with the gender oppression I had ignored. However, it was complicated, messy, and not easily compartmentalized from my racial identity. Later, I reflected on an experience in college where I was called something like honey, sweetie, or baby from a Black male and confronting him on it. He told me it was a term of an endearment and fearing my isolation from other Black people and needing to have a united front, I thanked him for his perspective and questioned why I did not see his kindness. Upon reflection in my 30s, I realized that in that moment, affinity with other Black people was so important for me that I sacrificed my need to feel respected as a woman, a sentiment that I carried most of my life.

When I began working professionally, discrimination was centered on questions of my intelligence and abilities that were both about my Blackness and my womanhood. These specific two intersecting identities often felt at odds with each other, fighting for attention to be at the forefront of my conception of self. The intersections of my identity of being a woman and Black created a unique set of experiences with injustice that also shaped my identity in a distinct way. I found that

this difference required that I navigate sexism with the lens that racism often impacted the ways I was faced with sexist oppression. Similarly, racist experiences were often wrapped in sexist ideas.

This intesectionality was where I entered the research. My own experiences have significantly impacted the way I think about and view the world. This perspective has shaped the questions I want answers to and that I sought throughout this dissertation study. In particular, my empathy with participants was natural and created somewhat of an instant connection. I was also able to understand some nuance experiences because they aligned with my own, creating additional context. I was also able to probe deeper with my participants because of this experience. I shared stories with my participants as a way to create safety during the interview process; but it also helped participants make connections to questions and connect to current events, political issues, and their own experiences. We created some solidarity around our experiences as doctoral students. This additional layer to the intersections of identity of race and gender influenced how participants made meaning of their experiences. In particular the complex experience of navigating racism and sexism collectively often creates the uncertainty of understanding oppression. Being able to share my own reflections acted as a catalyst for dialogue and mirrored cultural traditions of passing on oral history and recreated foundational feminist circles of consciousness-raising.

Professional Experience

For approximately 10 years I worked in roles in student affairs in various diversity/social justice practitioner positions with progressive leadership. The most significant of these was a four-year role as the director of a diversity office at a small private liberal arts college. During my time in this role, I built strong relationships

with my students through advising, programming, and one-on-one or group discussions. As one of few Black women on that campus, in many ways I felt responsibility for my students, especially students of color, as if I were an additional parent. I sincerely connect to research calling this behavior other mothering, a concept acted out by many women in the Black community to protect youth in the absence of, or in addition to, birth parents (Edwards, 2000). As I became a surrogate parent and/or mentor to these students, I found my role shifting from mere administrator to family, in which I learned as much from them as hopefully they did from me.

As a director I was charged with advising student organizations. One such group was the Black student organization that staged a large protest event spawning from students dressing in Blackface for Halloween, mistreatment in classes, and low numbers of students of color on campus in general. Through this process I was involved with supporting my students via advisement, mentorship, and emotional support. Coupled with my own passion around activism, the engagement with student activism continued to be nourished within me.

My experience in this role was very present with me as I engaged in research that centers on the lives of Black women activists. It was important that I did not place meaning on the narratives of my participants that could not also be found in the participants' stories. Instead I used this background as a way to influence dialogue and used my own story to provide ways of creating a comfortable environment for my participants to discuss the research with me.

Research as Activism

When I began this doctoral program the #BlackLivesMatter (BLM) movement was just beginning. Regularly, news stories chronicled the events of the movement

with arguments pondering if the BLM demonstrations were the beginning stages of a movement or just a mere moment in time. During this period, similar action began happening in the surrounding Colorado area. Little if any activism was specifically happening on my institution's campus, and I found myself aching for involvement in the resistance in anyway considering the issues so significantly impacted my life. However, I also worried that if I went to participate in activist work that I would be taking much needed time away from my coursework or I would not return with a positive mental state. Thus, I vowed that I would make my work speak for me. I now see my role as a researcher to be a scholar activist. The work I do will always seek to center the voices of marginalized communities and aim to support change and critique the oppressive systems that are providing challenge and harm.

Not only do I bring voice to my participants' lived experiences, I give voice and leverage to my own. Freire and Ramos (2000) stated, "the revolutionary's role is to liberate, and be liberated, with the people—not to win them over" (p. 95). For me this suggests mutual learning that is embedded in many cultural paradigms and reflects the desire to seek true growth, not just have a friendly engagement with participants. To begin the act of mutual learning I represented my story in this research by sharing my artistic story (detailed in Chapter IV) with participants. Creating an art piece and discussing the representations of my own experience provided a space for engaged dialogue and lessoned power dynamics at play during the research process. However, I believe that after my research was completed, my participants became a part of me as well. In turn, my responsibility was to accurately detail their narratives and shift discussions, as their stories become a part of public conversation and action.

Research Methods

Current discussions on racial justice often center as a male-dominated focus. To counter this emphasis, I explored how participants understood the issues facing Black women who are not being addressed in current race-based activism. Using unstructured interviews allowed room to follow-up or seek clarification on participant's stories (Jones et al., 2014). Additionally, engaging in interviews required active engaged listening to capture potential underlying meaning in responses that required further discussion with participants (Jones et al., 2014). Coupled with the counterstory methodology, participants fully contributed to the natural ebb and flow of the discussion.

After Institutional Review Board approval (see Appendix A), data were collected using unstructured interviews in an effort to expose the complexity within the question and topic under study (Jones et al., 2014). These interviews were open-ended and allowed space for follow-up and flexibility (Jones et al., 2014). By doing this, the participants shaped the interview. Mishler (1990) suggested that having joint construction of meaning in interviews allows for the participant to respond according to one's own specification and understanding rather than holding fast to the specifics of the question. Therefore, I sought to create a relaxed dialogue. Follow-up questions and clarity seeking were based on the present conversation that organically materialized. Thus, participants shared their own lived experiences without the harden structure of traditional interviews.

Participants were Black women doctoral students enrolled at a predominately White institution, ranging from a large university in the West, a large university in the Southeast, a mid-sized institution in the Southwest, and a large institution in the

Midwest. I traveled to each location and interviewed students at each school. Previous professional relationships with individuals at each institution supported my ability to identify participants that met my criteria. Additionally, recruitment e-mails disbursed via social media groups gathered other participants. However, each institution had additional characteristics that made them ideal for this study.

Large Public Institution

Recently, this institution saw significant activism on the campus around racial issues and the support or lack thereof from the institution. The campus was also home to a population of persons with undocumented status. Lastly, this school had consistently been documented as one of the most diverse campuses in the nation, always landing in the top 10.

Mid-Sized Public Institution

As an institution located in the Midwest, this school had significant national political influence, particularly during election years. Additionally, not far from campus are known areas where a radical military style organization resided. It was commonly believed that this group was in essence a racially centered hate group, creating an added intensity to the local environment.

Participant Selection

The participants for this study were self-identified women who also identified as part of the Black diaspora and had been actively engaged in race-based activism, activism centered on justice seeking and advocacy around the issue of race (see Table 1). First, I employed purposeful sampling (Jones et al., 2014) by connecting with various directors of identity-based centers (i.e., cultural centers, women's centers, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender [LGBT] centers) and requested that they send

out my invitation for participants and/or introductions to specific groups. Snowball sampling was also used (Creswell, 2013) as participants were asked to suggest additional women for the study.

Table 1

Participants

Pseudonym	Academic program	Location	Identities
Andrea	Social & behavioral sciences	East Coast	Cisgender, Black, woman, first generation
Butterfly	Curriculum & instruction	South	Black, woman, Christian
Cynthia	Special education	South	African American, first generation
Dream	Higher education	West	Cisgender, Black, Nigerian, queer woman
Ella	Cultural studies	West	Biracial, Black woman, German, military family
Faye	Education	West	African American, woman, Christian
Kathy	Education	Midwest	Biracial, heterosexual, Christian, fluffy, woman
Michelle	Education	Southwest	Black, cisgender, woman, military family, upper-middle class, spiritual
Ms.	Education	South	Black, woman, spiritual
Zora	Higher education & student affairs	Midwest	Black, cisgender, straight, woman, person of faith (Christian convert from Muslim)

Data Collection

A five-step process was used to collect data for the research study, which is fully detailed below. Step one, included the development of a list that was created by the participants prior to interviews. Step two was the review of the created participant list in the interview setting with additional questions after the review. Step three was participant reflection on their own outside of the interview process about their experience; this can be in a personal journal or simply just thinking through the conversation. Step four was the second interview where participants shared their reflections from the previous interview and created their artistic story with follow-up discussion (see Appendix B). Lastly, participants were asked to do a post-interview reflection that was completed on their own via an e-mail submission (see Appendix C). The outlined process sought to obtain a well-rounded understanding of perspectives while creating relationships (see Appendix D).

Interviews were anywhere from one hour to 1.5 hours in length. Each interview took place in a location that was most comfortable to the participant. Following each interview, I did a free-write reflection which allowed me to (a) recall first impressions of the interview, (b) identify any themes that emerged during the interview, and (c) have a place to detail how I was impacted by the research. The topic was one that is emotionally charged and impacts me personally. It was important that I processed through these items appropriately.

Participants were interviewed in person twice, when possible on consecutive days or at least with somewhat of a break in interview time (i.e., interview one in the morning and interview two in the evening). The separation of interview times was to allow participants time to reflect on their first conversation for me. Having time to

process the interview allowed participants to think deeper about what they shared and then discuss this reflection during their second interview. The first interview sought to acquire a general understanding of the participant and her involvement in activism. In this interview I identified structures of the organizations participants were involved in and how they came to be engaged in the work of activism as a whole. During the second interview I introduced creative components, such as the artist story, detailed below, that sought to elicit more in-depth responses. Focusing on the sensitive nature of activism, as part of the second interview I asked participants to consider if there was an additional impact from their involvement in race-based activism. The following section details each interview further and outlines specific questions and components of each interview.

Interview One: Participant List

In an effort to elicit in-depth responses, I employed additional data collection methods to spark conversation. Before the interview participants were asked to create a list of the most pressing issues they felt were facing Black women today that, if possible, they would be engaged in activism around (see Appendix E), which I have termed participant list. The list acted as a jumping off point to discuss with the participants how they had experienced activist spaces with their intersectionality and how they had navigated those spaces. Additionally, the women were able to share what they thought was or was not missing from race-based activism. Secondly, there was a short list of additional questions (see Appendix F), which were influenced by Black feminist thought, critical race feminist perspective, and alignment with the objectives of testimonio and testifying. These questions sought to assist the participants in sharing their story more deeply. The questions also acted as a guide for

additional discussion points, if necessary, for participants. The list was generated to support the flow of the conversation during the interview and was used to assist if there was a lull in conversation or if there was a need to follow-up on components shared by participants.

Interview Two: Artistic Story

Participants were also be asked to draw, write, or create an image or narrative that explained their experience as an intersectional Black woman engaged in race-based activism (see Appendix G), which I have termed artistic story. Fimo clay, markers, crayons, and pens were provided for use in creating these artistic stories. With participant permission, I took pictures of each woman's hands creating or holding their art. After discussion of the participant's artistic story, I shared my own. In so doing, I provided a full sharing of experience while allowing the participants to learn more about me as a Black woman.

Instead of only recounting stories, this activity gave participants intentional reflection on their activism. This data collection method brought forth the emotional impact that may have transpired from their experiences. Additionally, the artistic stories helped participants discuss how their intersectional identities played a role throughout the activist process.

The Mosaic approach (Clark, 2005) was developed as a way to better communicate with the children around their experiences in children services (Clark, 2005). Defined as a methodology, Mosaic introduces interactive tools to the techniques of observation and interviewing. This process seeks to create different pieces of a puzzle to develop a full documentation of experience (Clark, 2005). Similarly, in this study I used the ideas of introducing an interactive component to

create a full picture so that participants were documenting their own experience instead of it solely being reported by someone else.

Analysis of the making of the artistic story was done in several ways. First, during the creation of the piece I documented the conversation, movements, and expressed feelings shared by the participants. Engagement in participant observer practices allows another layer of data, adding to the mosaic of information where findings materialize (Greenfield, 2011; Jones et al., 2014). Clarifying questions were used to ensure messages are not being read into the creations to allow for true documentation of feelings.

Artistic Stories in Action

In an effort to provide a process that centered the cultural ideas of storytelling while creating an environment that held space to honor the intimacy of the research, I used the tool of artistic story. Derived from Clark's (2005) Mosaic technique, artistic story provided an additional avenue to elicit response. In considering cultural implications of research, using techniques that mirror cultural ideas of connections and story were important to develop relationships with my participants. In addition, I considered the deeper understanding that story brought forth, particularly for Black Americans. Story has been used as a directional map to navigate safe spaces and escape during slavery. It is used to pass on historical knowledge, which included family traditions, survival techniques, and empowerment. For me this also connected to ways of understanding self on a higher level. Wrapped in the cultural guides of story were also spiritual ways of being. We believed in the ownership of our bodies, minds, and power even when a system believed otherwise. This reclamation of our existence is deeply rooted in the Black American experience. Using what I termed

artistic story was my way of holding space for the participants to tap into that ancestral spirit.

The Process

Participants were asked to create an artistic story that symbolized how they felt as intersectional Black women participating in race-based activism. Various art supplies were provided and the woman either completed their art prior to our meeting or during our time together. I created my own artistic story as well. Since the first participant chose to complete her artistic story prior to our interview, I did the same. Every interview following, I brought my completed artistic story with me and shared it after the participant's story was shared. I used the artistic stories as a way to help both the women and me not overly intellectualize our feelings. The act of creating art acted as a reflective tool that gave the women the ability to give voice to their feelings in a concrete way. The art brought the conversation from a solely head space to a heart space. Often communicating personal stances about the activist platforms that resonates with someone is an exercise that is well practiced. However, getting to the core of emotion regarding their work and how it has personal impact did not always come as freely. Perhaps the vulnerability of emotion and centering of the heart is why the practice of sitting in emotion does not come as easily. The artistic story opened the ability to sit in feelings and be present. In spiritual practice it is said that the heart chakra "represents transformation" (Arewa, 1998, p. 195). Centering the heart moves us from the concrete to the abstract, from the physicality of the body to the higher consciousness of spiritual insight (Arewa, 1998). In some ways the artistic story opened the women's heart chakras creating sacred space that was collectively held for each other and in turn awakened spiritual enlightenment.

The Struggle

A few of the participants were challenged by the task of completing their artistic story. The struggle was in relation to their artistic ability and feelings of needing to produce a strong product at the completion of the allotted time. However, at the start of this part of the study, I communicated repeatedly that the purpose of this component was to create another way to process and work through our feelings on the topic. I wanted the art to be reflective of their feelings. Still, I did not consider that feelings around being ill equipped artistically would cause pause or frustration. One could guess that this feeling of being ill equipped could be directly connected to feeling the need to be prepared similarly for the activism the participants completed. It would seem that participants were used to being together and prepared for the work they would do. Feelings of not being skilled enough to complete the task, the artistic story, perhaps brought up more feelings. Unfortunately, this answer was not discovered during our time together. Luckily, each woman eventually completed the artistic story. What transpired was a beautiful reflective process.

Post Interview Reflection

Participant reflection was done in two ways. First, during the beginning of the second interview participants were asked if they had any initial reflection from the first conversation. Participants could choose to do their own reflection in between interviews in whatever way was the most comfortable for them (i.e., jotting down feelings, discussion with another person, journaling, etc.). Second, after the final interview participants were asked to share their thoughts of the overall experience through their own written e-mail journal reflection. This could be done in a bulleted list or written statement that could be as long or short as the participants liked. Some

chose to reflect in this way, others did not. This provided reflection allowed a final opportunity for participants to give voice of their experience and to provide a full circle analysis of their lived experiences.

Data Analysis

The methodologies used for this research did not have specific outlined guidelines for data analysis, as common with some methodologies (Jones et al., 2014). Thus, aligning the work with analysis techniques that seemed to also incorporate values of counterstory as well as the theoretical perspective of Black feminist thought were deemed necessary. In general, the analysis process gives space for the researcher to recognize patterns or unique moments appearing in the data and connects it with the overarching themes of the work (Jones et al., 2014).

Using a form of narrative methodology suggests the reliance on narrative analysis techniques such as reading interview transcripts to develop themes and connecting dialogue to literature to assist in understanding (Jones et al., 2014). These techniques required the research focus to be centered on the individuals' stories. The researcher "'re-storys' these narratives through analysis and interpretation" (Jones et al., 2014, p. 85) considering how they accurately represent the voices of participants becoming a narrator in written form. In addition, the narrative interpretive approach of focusing on what is being told in the story incorporates the social context with the participant's story (Jones et al., 2014). Collectively, these concepts begin to detail the analysis process that was used in this work. However, since the chosen methodology did not outline a structured approach, additional aspects were considered.

Theoretical Sensitivity

Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggested that theoretical sensitivity refers to the research's ability to recognize the nuance information that arises in data collection. There are several sources of sensitivity from which theoretical sensitivity is derived, including both professional experience and personal experience (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Throughout the research it was important to be aware of language and experiences that were culturally specific. This technique uncovers underlying meaning and perceptions of participants and influences the interpretation of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In addition, researcher insight is accounted for in the research process, drawing on personal experience and community connection. A researcher's professional experience becomes impactful in the data collection process, as it may provide additional understanding about similar situations that may have parallel realities expressed in research. The knowledge base the researcher comes to the data with provides a depth of understanding that may not be present among those without the same background. Personal experience acts in a similar way as the researcher's life experience can also provide more understanding to participants' navigation of various issues. However, it was also important that the comparison was not one of having a comparable journey, but rather the ability to be compassionate and sympathetic to others' experiences (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Bernal (1998) expanded on the idea of theoretical sensitivity suggesting that the sources expressed by Strauss and Corbin (1990) influence Chicana feminist epistemology in educational research. However, the additional components of collective experience and community memory are added to create cultural sensitivity (Bernal, 1998).

I specifically used theoretical sensitivity in my research throughout the data collection process, but perhaps it is most recognizable in data analysis. Since I had similar identities as my participants, I brought a cultural background that provided context and understanding of terminology and lingo that was used. This background knowledge allowed larger understanding of the dialogue in data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Strauss and Corbin (1990) also suggest that as the researcher is engaged with the data, another source of theoretical sensitivity is activated. This includes, but is not limited to, comparing information, questioning the data and "in turn, the researcher uses these to look again at the data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 43).

Cultural Intuition

Cultural intuition springboards from Strauss and Corbin's (1990) personal experience by suggesting there are familial and historical ties. Thus, generational history and oral stories develop a personal moral code. These life lessons and cultural truths shape individual perceptions (Bernal, 1998). Brought to the data analysis process, the researcher takes their community understanding when working with others with similar upbringing and in essence can provide a deeper analysis (Bernal, 1998).

I used cultural intuition similarly in this work, as my cultural background significantly impacts how I view and analyze the data collected. Further, I used the historical oppression and the journey to liberation aligned with participant experience. Thus, I used cultural intuition to also reflect the connections that were present with my life experiences and that of research participants.

The source of personal experience honors the experience the researcher brings to the work and leverages it to support understanding of the collected data (Bernal, 1998). Further linking the researcher and the participants, cultural intuition recognizes that having similar experiences, both culturally and socially, enhances analysis, and strengthens interpretation (Bernal, 1998). My identities as a Black women doctoral student aligned with the population under study. Therefore, my comprehension of events, stories, and experiences shared among participants were similar to my own. Instead of this being negative, my cultural intuition afforded me the ability to understand nuance information that was shared as well as provided in the moment reflection with participants due to our shared realities.

Discovering Patterns

In an effort to hold true to my desire to create a research process that challenges traditional ideas, I chose to use analysis measures that developed somewhat organically. Originally, I planned to first go through each transcript and identify preliminary patterns of the dialogue using color highlights throughout the text in a Word document. I then planned to move groups of dialogue that aligned with a particular theme to a separate document. I found this process to not flow well for me and instead moved to using large sticky paper with themes across the top. I then printed out dialogue from the study and posted it underneath the appropriate theme. Then, I used these pairings to create blackout poems to concisely communicate the major concepts of the story being presented. This process to some degree aligned with and influenced by what Glesne (1997) called poetic transcription. Disbursing the data via this experimental writing combines the information derived from multiple data points, such as researcher notes and transcripts, to present the research in an order

developed by the researcher (Glesne, 1997). Further, this explorative play of writing to represent dialogue challenges traditional conservative ideas of how researchers should present data (Glesne, 1997). Glesne also noted that, “In the process of blurring boundaries, experimental writing helps to heal wounds of scientific categorization and technological dehumanization. With its aesthetic sensibilities, experimental writing can introduce spirit, imagination, and hope” (p. 214). Thus, I used this reimagining of the narrative of my participants to create a liberatory practice that centers Black women’s voices as the essence of the research rather than the thematic structures themselves. In turn, the “poetic transcription creates a third voice that is neither the interviewee’s nor the researcher’s but is a combination of both . . . [it] disintegrates any notion of separation of observer and observed” (Glesne, 1997, p. 215).

Qualitative Trustworthiness

In an effort to reject traditional ideas of scientific inquiry, I discarded terms such as rigor for language intertwines the researcher and the researched. In qualitative research trustworthiness indicates that we believe the researcher as taking steps to make sure the work is of high quality and that we have confidence in the findings of the study (Jones et al., 2014). However, this assumes predetermined criteria to judge trustworthiness that may not account for cultural norms along with the history of oppression that accompanies these different realities. Thus, in my research I used other supporting language to uplift marginalized voices throughout the full research process.

Bochner (2018) suggested that interpretivist researchers’ “work is couched in a vocabulary that emphasizes horizons of human meaning, relational being, moral reflection, subjectivity, embodiment, compassion, empathy, and social justice” (p. 5). I find my line of thinking to align with this description and reflected these ideas through

outlining my approach to maintaining trustworthiness. Bochner further illustrated this idea by indicating those who engage with their audience in a non-traditional scientific way are concerned with empowerment, reaching a larger audience, seek conversation entangled with emotion, and view themselves as "not only a researcher but also as a writer and a communicator" (p. 2). Ultimately, I believe the use of traditional language in referring to the research process is oppressive and reduplicates a White supremacist notion of what the banner language is and what counts as real research. Rejecting this idea, along with presenting experience in its most accurate form, means discarding structure and instead embracing the organic development.

Trustworthiness and Validation

Different researchers communicate various ways that the high quality of a study can be ensured (Jones et al., 2014). Some researchers suggest the language of trustworthiness to assure confidence in the research findings, while others suggest validation or authenticity is connected. Still, others note that this creates an uplifting of procedure over relational matters (Jones et al., 2014). In the following components, I note techniques I used to strengthen quality in my study while also centering the relationship between the researcher and participants.

Member checking and credibility. In an effort to support trustworthiness, I used member checking. Participants received transcripts of their interviews to confirm the narrative was captured accurately (Creswell, 2013). They had seven days to read over the transcriptions, identify any errors, and send those updates to me (Jones et al., 2014). Allowing the participants to review the material provides credibility markers and allowed the participants to indicate if they recognize their experience in the data

(Krefting, 1991). The practice of sharing this information minimizes misrepresentation.

Credibility. For credibility purposes, the data were collected until saturation was reached (Jones et al., 2014). This was dependent on spending adequate time in the field to identify themes and allowing the experience of intersectionality in activism to be confirmed by other participants (Jones et al., 2014; Krefting, 1991). Each participant was interviewed two separate times in an effort to confirm information in the first interview and to follow-up on previously communicated stories (Jones et al., 2014). This practice additionally requires that the researcher has sufficient time with the participants to verify their perspectives, which allowed for more rapport to develop (Krefting, 1991).

Crystallization. I employed several nontraditional means of study to understand the experience of participants. Seeking to enact resistance to power, I combined numerous methods and data points creating a multilayered narrative (Ellingson, 2014).

> Crystallization combines multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation into a coherent text or series of related texts, building on a rich, and opening partial account of a phenomenon that problematizes its own construction, highlights researcher's vulnerabilities and positionality, makes claims about socially constructed meanings, and reveals the indeterminacy of knowledge claims even as it makes them. (Ellingson, 2014, p. 4)

Engaging theoretical triangulation, I used Black feminist thought and CRF as theoretical frameworks while also providing a transparent personal look through my positionality statement. Further, crystallization situates the cultural and political nuance that is present in this study. Specifically, considering that the body is not apolitical, it is instead a holder of knowledge and cannot be separated from

understanding and experience (Ellingson, 2014). Therefore, to align with the principles of crystallization, meaning was continuously (re)negotiated among the participants and me to illuminate interpretations of the stories (Ellingson, 2014).

Emancipatory Practices

Aligning with previous discussed goals of challenging traditional ideas of conducting research, I embraced emancipatory paradigm criteria to discuss the quality of this research (Mertens, 2014). The terms of transferability and confirmability are exchanged for positionality, attention to voice, and critical reflexivity to honor principles outlined in the emancipatory paradigmatic concepts.

Positionality. Through the transparency I used in my reflection, I noted my identities that align with participants as well as those areas of identity that could be problematic in the research process. In stating these issues I called attention to the reality that I cannot fully depict a universal truth (Mertens, 2014). Instead, I situated my work contextually to tell a truth that is real for my participants but may not fully resonate across all lived experiences (Mertens, 2014). In my previous positionality statement, I communicated my point of view as I entered and progressed through the research process in an effort to clearly situate my work.

Attention to voice. The centering of voice is paramount in my research. I believe I have great responsibility to tell the stories of Black women, a community that has been historically marginalized. I created blackout poems by gathering dialogue across participants that supported a particular theme. By using the dialogue gathered, I sought to use the words of my participants and present their stories through the context of art. I believe art removes barriers that arise through the use of academic language. If I speak for a community through the work of my research, it is my responsibility to

find ways to communicate their experience in plain language that is as accessible as possible.

Critical reflexivity. Having a "heightened degree of self-awareness for personal transformation" (Mertens, 2008, p. 40) is crucial in executing critical reflexivity. I accounted for this concept in my research by having several components in the research process that provided opportunity for reflection for both my participants and me. As stated later in Chapter IV, throughout the research process I uncovered and massaged my understanding of my personal identity. This unanticipated uncovering of identity further added a lens from which I analyzed the data. The designed research process encouraged deeper conceptions of reflection from the development of blackout poems, to the creation of my own artistic story, providing multiple tools for critical reflection.

Dependability. Changes that occurred in the research process are detailed throughout this document aligning with dependability techniques (Mertens, 2008). Particularly evident in Chapter IV, I communicate how participants felt about components of planned data collection and how those concerns were considered. Organic development was also accounted for in the process. When aspects materialized that may not have been expected but felt more natural or appropriate for the study, they were incorporated and also discussed in this document.

Chapter Summary

Through this study the exploration of Black women's intersectional identity and engagement within race-based activist spaces was explored. With the desire to create spaces that acknowledge cultural aspects of understanding while bringing forth

hidden truths, the research explored somewhat uncharted territory. In essence, I sought to aid participants in what hooks (1989) called self-recovery.

> The most important of our work—the work of liberation—demands of us that we make a new language, that we create the oppositional discourse, the liberatory voice. Fundamentally, the oppressed person who has liberatory voice, emerges only when the oppressed experience self-recovery. (p. 30)

In honoring the journey of self-recovery, I present this research as a basis for guiding the path for my participants. In this chapter I outlined several aspects that collectively designed research of the topic under study in ways that felt authentic and culturally grounded. First, I detailed my use of the critical paradigm to challenge dominant narratives and interrogate systems within the stories shared. Then, I noted that the ontological perspective of historic realism suggests that reality is formed through several influences that include social, political, and cultural aspects, which are informed by continual internal factors. Using an endarkend feminist epistemology (Dillard, 2000), I expressed how reality is known when it is grounded in Black feminist thought, which sways development of socialized notions of race and gender. Next, concepts of Black feminist thought (Collins, 1986, 2000) and CRF perspective (Wing, 1997) provided the theoretical framework of the study calling attention to the experiences of Black women's intersectionality and the impact oppression places on these identities. Counterstory (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) with influences of testimonio (Beverley, 2000; Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012) and testifying (Baszile, 2008) provided the methodology that was used in the study that centered cultural ways of expression rooted in storytelling. Finally, my researcher positionality, methods used to execute the study and ways the data were analyzed completed the chapter.

CHAPTER IV

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

In this chapter I present the profiles of the 10 Black women interviewed for this research study. Each participant had unique identities that shaped her worldview and perspective on the conversation we had.

Originally, I imagined that I would tell the stories that unfolded during the interviews as a collective narrative that surmised the experiences that were shared during our intimate conversations. However, as the study progressed and was completed it became clear that many of the stories being told were specific to each woman. Though there were some common themes, much of the stories detailed how intersectionality manifested for each woman specifically.

Instead, to represent the articulation of the themes that emerged, I created blackout poems from interview excerpts to illuminate the main concept communicated from each participant. Blackout poems are created when text is removed from written words in a paragraph leaving behind a select few words which in turn are used to tell a story from the materialized poem (Kleon, 2012). I also used this tool as a way to be cognizant of the community of readers who are possible for this work. Recognizing that academic language can be isolating, exclusive, and based on a dominant cultural paradigm, I wanted to find ways to connect the messages of the study in another way. Thus, I used blackout poems as an additional way to communicate the voices of the Black women from this study. The poems that were created detailed significant

understandings from each participant. From communicating self-discovery of intersectionality, experiences during activist work, or activist platform passion, the blackout poems unfolded integral components of each woman's story.

Throughout the interview process there was a sense of urgency to talk among the participants. We seemed to almost dive into conversations instantly, so much so in fact, that little demographic information was gathered from each participant. Names, location, and general educational program were all that was shared. In light of this, I presented Table 1 in Chapter III that gives a general overview of the participants documented. Though the background of participants was not a central focus of this study, understanding how each woman came to the conversation is important. Through this chapter I will share participant profiles, communicate their feelings on the research topic via blackout poem, and document participant reflections through their artistic stories.

Participant Profiles

Cherjanét

I am a Black, bisexual, cisgender woman, originally from the Midwest. My identity as a queer person is something I just became able to articulate throughout this doctoral journey. Even in deciding to document this revelation here still feels uneasy and deeply personal, especially when terminology still does not seem to completely fit. However, in thinking about my integrity as a researcher and my philosophy of being authentic at all times, I felt it necessary to share it here. Further, there is power in deciding how my narrative is told and choosing to tell it my own way is empowering. When I considered the bravery of my participants and sharing all of who they are, I had to share all of who I am here. Though many people have shared that

they always assumed I was queer or my favorite, had a queer politic, I am still learning how this identity shapes me. However, I have spent a lot time processing my other identities. Still, I am not exactly sure when I recognized my intersectionality. However, I pride myself on being rather self-reflective and include processing identity as part of the process. I recalled in undergrad having conversations suggesting that my Blackness seemed to trump my gender. I used to feel that race was the bigger issue, as I was very conscious of the ways I was oppressed based on my race, but how I was impacted by sexism was not always clear. However, I would say that my understanding of intersectionality would have had to materialize somewhere during my professional career as a student affairs practitioner. Still, the term was not fully internalized or engrained in my vocabulary until beginning doctoral work. As I started graduate school the number of Black women with a doctorate degree was a consistent conversation, one that communicated I was becoming a part of an elite community, a responsibility I was not sure I was ready for. Though I have always identified as a Black woman, the complete inability to focus on those identities as separate entities was even more apparent. My life experiences are connected by the understanding that I am a Black woman, not Black and a woman, the distinction is important. The complexity of identity and interconnected oppression is unique and the more education I have received the more apparent this is for me. I also internalized the political nature of my body and my intersectionality in graduate work. When I began my program, there was only one other Black woman in my doctoral program. The relief I felt when we connected was deeper than just identifying another Black person in the room. It was about knowing that someone would intimately understand how I was navigating multiple realties at once. Though our life experiences were not identical, we

understood each other on a higher level. The political nature of our sheer presence in the room, on campus, and in the small town our university resides was a dank cloud hovering over us. Beginning this study I was looking forward to making connections with other Black women with similar experiences in their respective doctoral programs. I needed to find community among those who experienced pain like mine and was still pushing through it. Some of the women in this study have stated that Black women's presence in academic spaces is, in itself, activism. I could not agree with this idea more.

> I also grew up being told I was middle class. . . . I definitely had the experience of "you're not Black enough. You didn't grow up in the hood, you don't know what it's like to, yada-yada-yada.". . . And I think I spent a lot of my college career trying to prove my Blackness by the things I was involved with, trying to get involved with a Greek organization, just so I could say that I was Black enough. So now, my Blackness is not defined by the things that I'm a part of; my Blackness is defined by me just showing up. I am, therefore I have a Black experience. But I think that that definitely colors how folks think about their other identities, because of all those different things. And intersectionality to me, I feel is the way we should be having these conversations about anything. Because when you piece out those pieces, you're really not getting at someone's real experience. So, that's why this was the topic for me, because it combines all these pieces I've been processing for years.

Intersectionality being left out of the conversation of race-based activism is something I have been processing in different forms, though not always aware of the connections. I have long believed that Black women bare much of the responsibility in activist work. Through this study I finally had the opportunity to process how we have become the faithful workhorse.

Worker bee. [redacted] I'm expected to be a momma and take care of people [redacted]

[redacted] to [redacted] be a mammy [redacted] make sure [redacted] everyone else was taken care of. [redacted] everyone else's needs before mine [redacted] I'm supposed to be of service. [redacted] to show up and serve. [redacted] a foot soldier. [redacted] being invisible. [redacted] I'm not a person. [redacted] a number that adds to the body of people [redacted] doing this work. [redacted]

Cherjanét's artistic story. I chose to create a figure out of clay for my artistic story (see Figure 1). The act of physically creating art spoke to me and was somewhat meditative. The process of creating allowed me to really think through what I was creating to fully communicate my feelings in the project. I recall thinking about who was in the driver's seat when thinking about the public figures of activism, both in historical and contemporary contexts. Almost exclusively, the face of activism centered on men. Even when the figures were woman identified, as in contemporary activism, the mainstream story continues to swing back to maleness. Thus, it seems

men are in the driver's seat and I am sent to the back seat. In the backseat is where the distractions are. Children, other travelers, tools for the journey, all ride in the backseat. However, I never felt I was able to leisurely enjoy the ride; no, I had work to do in the back. This analogy was very present for me and colored the lens I looked through my entire research. In an effort to share in the reflection process, I shared these sentiments with each participant. I had been thinking about my experiences for a while, and for the first time was able to fully express how I felt as a Black women doing activist work.

> I'm supposed to be a mama to all these babies and take care of them regardless if they're my children or not, I'm supposed to take care of them. Thinking about that Black man, I'm supposed to take care of him like that was my job . . . I'm supposed to always serve . . . I'm invisible. I'm supposed to show up, I'm supposed to do the work, but I'm still invisible. It's almost like I'm not even there . . . I'm hurt and I'm in pain and you don't even see it. [I'm a] foot soldier . . . I'm supposed to show up. I'm supposed to do all the groundwork, I'm supposed to do all the behind the scenes work, I'm supposed to organize everything, I'm supposed to make sure everybody is taking care of, I'm supposed to make sure that everybody's voice is being heard except mine. Then I'm supposed to take a back seat.

It seems my story almost predicted the findings of this research. In essence, it clearly reiterates the experience of so many Black women doctoral student activists. Throughout this research I have gained deeper understanding of my feelings, connected with others, and perhaps shifted my beliefs. The personal has always been political for me, but I have now had a space to be in community around this hard work. In some ways this work was therapeutic, and in other ways I have new wonderings and questions.

Figure 1. Cherjanét's artistic story (2019).

Andrea

Andrea identified as a Black woman who was a first generation student. Andrea expressed noticing a shift in her identity as a master's student when she realized that she was the only domestic Black student in her program at an elite Ivy League institution. She recalls questioning the circumstances around her admittance, wondering if she was accepted because she fit a racial or social-economic group that was desirable. Andrea was insecure about how she made it in, and she wondered if she

could handle the academic rigor of the institution. She noticed that there were many Black people at the school program, but they were from other countries. Andrea was the only Black person from the United States, which meant her Black experience was different from others. Her insecurity deepened as she reflected on her upbringing and family dynamic and felt challenged by the elite institution and navigating the new culture. Differences continued to emerge for Andrea and her peers as she learned that many students come from elite undergraduate institutions, while Andrea had attended a large public school. Further exacerbating the issues, many students were also pursuing their third or fourth degree, which was a different reality for her. Moreover, Andrea struggled with mental health issues and navigating her first-generation identity, noting that she didn't have a network of people at home to support her through this time.

However, Andrea says she did not fully become comfortable discussing issues of identity and social justice until her doctoral program, where she said she entered her program with a critical activist mindset. Essentially, she believed she had a strong responsibility to articulate the issues happening within her community, as she needed to be a voice for those who were not being heard.

[redacted] I was reflecting more [redacted] I think part of the problem [redacted] we like to pick out certain issues [redacted] picking [redacted] specific things [redacted] instead of looking [redacted] macro level, larger picture [redacted] contributing to the problems. [redacted] the [redacted] big [redacted] burden

that Black women have to carry [redacted] within our homes and with our children and within our communities. [redacted] "These are the larger problems that we're experiencing [redacted] once we [redacted] acknowledge and identify and be [redacted] critical of these larger issues, then we'll [redacted] delve into the specific details of [redacted] change with different circumstances [redacted]

Butterfly

Butterfly identified as a Black, Christian woman. Originally working as a high-ranking officer in a corporate industry, she often found herself to be one of very few Black people in her office or at work sites. As she continued to travel to the multiple spaces her position required, she began to notice that she did not see Black men. Butterfly believed racism was at the center of the problem and started to reevaluate her surroundings. At the same time her understanding of how she was impacted by her gender and race simultaneously started to come to light. While on the job she had the responsibility of speaking to the head of the organization in which she was working. During a private conversation, Butterfly informed the office head of the various protocols she did during her regular office visits. The organization head proceeded to explain that he had been in the business long before women were allowed to be in the profession, let alone Black women. Butterfly felt uncomfortable with the conversation and believed the White male office head was trying to intimidate her, suggesting that she couldn't possibly have the knowledge and skill to do the job she was doing. Though this experience was not pleasant, Butterfly also said that it was when she was most aware of her intersectionality. The assumptions regarding her skill level and place within her company made Butterfly question things she had previously ignored.

She began to recognize that though her industry had some Black women present, there were little to no Black men. Then she realized the struggle ahead of her to move up in the company, making her begin to think of other options.

Now in a doctoral program Butterfly believed she was more aware and conscious. Before being in her doctoral program she believed she was not always able to articulate the shifting dynamics of identity. However, courses that specifically examined race, class, and gender helped her further expand her understanding.

Where are the Black men? [redacted] I shifted [redacted] I [redacted] accepted my gender [redacted] That's what was the impetus for the change. [redacted] a difference [redacted] in race relations, [redacted] I would love to see Black men there [redacted] love to see Black men [redacted] pursue some [redacted] path [redacted] make a difference [redacted] Black men in that position. [redacted] my thought process.

Butterfly's artistic story. The artistic story allowed Butterfly to realize that she was able to connect with feelings that she had not previously let surface (see Figure 2). She recognized that without intention she had centered the experiences and needs of Black men above her own. In essence, Butterfly felt an obligation to take on the role of uplifting Black men. Similar to historical themes of uplifting the Black race, Butterfly was participating accordingly. Her actions were perhaps also wrapped in the ideas of being a Black mother and wife where the needs of her children and her husband come first. However, she began to recognize that perhaps this alone was no

longer acceptable to her. Butterfly created a poem as her work of art and began to reflect after reading aloud.

> I recognized based on my research, based on my life experience, that I did have this preoccupation with the Black male as being the most vulnerable . . . we all have our internal struggles. I struggled to find my voice. I did not consider my space or my intersectionality as a Black woman as a worthwhile space, I guess. This is just a reflection after everything, I thought my space was to advocate on behalf of Black men. That hasn't changed . . . I think, this poem was a place for me to reflect on that space that I had missed, that you kind of brought to my attention through your research.

Butterfly further reflected that our previous conversation provided a space for her to further connect historical experiences of Black women with her current understanding of Black women's experiences. She expressed almost guilt around being concerned about herself and the lack of attention on Black women's issues because historically Black women had worse experiences.

> Going back to the historical oppression . . . what comes to mind as a Black woman is . . . the sexual violations of slavery. That . . . is just something I don't dwell on because I can't dwell on it. It's disheartening to dwell on it. I don't know if [it is] a coping mechanism for me, as a contemporary woman in this society, [that] says, "Okay. At least that's not happening to me.". . . And says, "I may not be where I [want to] be, as a Black woman . . . but at least I'm not where we were as a people. Therefore, let me be grateful for the voice that I have today." Maybe that's a coping mechanism, not to give voice to my own needs in a more concrete way. I don't know . . . maybe, I never considered that space because I felt like, "at least I'm not being physically violated and I'm grateful for the opportunity to education." Yes, there are microaggressions, but at least I have the right to vote, I have the right—my body is my own right now, it belongs to me. . . . Maybe, I assess that at least I'm grateful for that. Let me advocate for what I consider to be more vulnerable. A population . . . more vulnerable than myself and I just discount my experience and my need for significance as a Black female.

I am a woman
A Black woman
A woman of short statue
Struggling to find significance
In spaces of privilege and power
Historically filled by Whites and males whose experiences are not mine.
How can I survive?
In a world that questions
My authority and my existence.

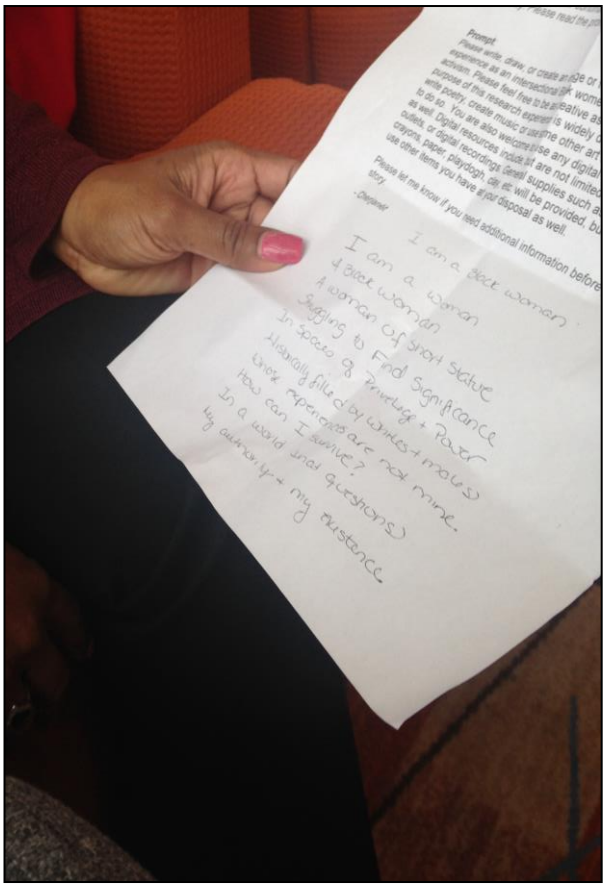

Figure 2. Butterfly's artistic story (2019).

When I shared my artistic story with Butterfly it felt like a beautiful sisterhood was materializing. She asked questions in real time while continuing her own processing. There were even a few instances that she almost finished my sentences when I was explaining what I created. This connection felt somewhat spiritual as our collective understanding was emerging in the context of our interview. We were creating a unified story that in some ways mirrored historical stories of Black women sisterhood when a collective understanding is needed for survival. We created a set of guidelines and principles for navigating hardship and shifting the narrative around our experience as Black women. This interaction became more than an interview, it became spiritual alignment.

Cynthia

Cynthia identified as a low income, African American woman who was the only child out of six to graduate high school. She spent her entire academic career at one institution and was also the first in her family to receive a doctoral degree. During her undergrad years, Cynthia was one of three Black women in her program. However, while obtaining both her master's and doctoral degrees she was the only African American. During her doctoral studies, Cynthia realized that expectations from one African American male faculty member were at a higher level than her peers. From disagreeing with her dissertation topic to her general use of common trendy language, Cynthia felt under the microscope around her everyday interactions with this professor. When discussing the situation with another professor, Cynthia was told the expectation was higher because the faculty knew her since she had received her previous degrees at the same institution. However, Cynthia did not believe this explanation. She believed she was giving the same amount of effort as everyone else in the program, perhaps even more, and still she was being scrutinized. The impact of this treatment weighed heavily on Cynthia as she shared her feelings about the professor,

> Me, you, we grew up in totally different . . . I grew up in the hood. I'm the only kid from out of six kids who graduated from high school, let alone being a damn doc. You didn't grow up like that. You grew up in a nice little neighborhood. He told me his grandfather and his dad, both have Ph.D.s [doctorate degrees]. I mean, you grew up around that. You're fostered in that type of environment and I wasn't. So how I'm approaching things is how I approach everything based on how I grew up. I guess he just had this higher expectation of me that I was just going to sit proper and agree with everything that he said.

It seemed this professor was acting as a gate-keeper adhering to Black respectability politics. His ideas of what was proper behavior for a Black woman

getting an advanced degree did not consider the lens with which Cynthia was walking through the world. Specifically, his behavior was bonded in patriarchal and sexist ideas of holding the key to power and success due to his maleness and his classist ideas of who should have access to the upper echelon of education. To him, Cynthia had to be taught how to behave accordingly, and she linked his actions to several aspects of her upbringing.

When I asked about the impact of the professor she was having problems with being a Black male professor, she had a significant emotional reaction.

> The thing was it made me feel like what I used to feel like growing up in the hood. . . . How Black men . . . I would see, I don't have an issue with Black men dating White women. I don't care, right? But it was like I felt like I had to do more to be looked at. It didn't matter that I was smart. It didn't matter that I took all the AP [advanced placement] classes, and I was top 10%. It didn't matter because all the men, all the Black men that I came across, even my father, that I went to speak to, it wasn't enough. I wasn't doing enough. But then again, you want to date a girl, a White girl that is D average, F average, just skipping classes, all that type of stuff and thought she was the Bomb.com. But they never see me. So it made me have a different perception of Black men as a whole. I think that really bothers me still to this day because I do. I do see them as though I'm not worthy enough. My skin color, even my committee chair, she's fair-skinned. She even says that. She's like, I can pass. I can pass the Brown bag test. But you can't because your dark skinned. I do see that people treat me differently because of that. It just infuriates me. Then they wonder why I come across sometimes as firm or aggressive. It's like I feel like I have to be because they're not going to listen to me regardless.

Cynthia was constantly beating the odds and achieving goals that surpassed her peers. However, the actions of those in her department rehashed childhood feelings of not being good enough simply because she did not look like or act as others wanted. For Cynthia colorism was a central theme of her activism and permeated her feelings about how activism needed to look different.

Dark skin. [redacted] that was the moment that [redacted] I felt [redacted] my dark skin[redacted] [redacted] dark skin [redacted] no one [redacted] said it out loud [redacted]. [redacted] [redacted] I did dance [redacted] [redacted] [redacted] we had [redacted] see-through mesh, [redacted] in our costume [redacted] Can we change this?" [redacted]

"Everyone needs to be the same. Everyone looks the same." I say, "Well, I don't look like them. [redacted] contact the person who made the costume. [redacted] [redacted] take a picture of me. [redacted] put coco in it. [redacted] He just walked away [redacted] He didn't say anything.

Cynthia's artistic story. During our time together Cynthia and I connected around similar life experiences and the overall dissertation process. We both acknowledged that in different academic spaces there was a sense of annoyance around Black women wanting their research to focus on issues of race (see Figure 3). For us, this meant we had to bottle up our personal frustration that there would be animosity about our choices of scholarship and push forward. Cynthia thought about this often and began to reflect out loud in our conversation even more.

> I thought about [it] again, what we discussed, and some of the injustice experiences that I experienced and how can I convey this in the collage. I think it's definitely made me into the person that I am today. To be honest with you, I always get, . . . but I always feel as though if I am talking about Black women issues or Black issues in general, that I'm just "Oh, of course she's talking about that cause she's Black. Of course, she's gonna do a research study on that 'cause she's Black. Of course, she's gonna do this type of dance 'cause she's Black.". . . I was just so tired of hearing that.

Criticisms around “me-search” often suggest that the researcher should separate one’s self as much as possible from the work they are studying. However, when the researcher and participants share similar identities and experiences, the commonality among them can create a research environment that feels like a more welcoming space and provides a reflection that may feel less intrusive than other forms of research. Instead, I believe there is a community conversation that transpires and the work feels less exploitive and more supportive.

Figure 3. Cynthia’s artistic story (2019).

Cynthia and I also discussed the complexity of my research and how some of what I was discussing brushes up against the contention between Black men’s and Black women’s relationships romantically and otherwise. When I began working on

this dissertation, I was struggling with my relationships with Black men, particularly in regard to a future romantic partnership. Since then, my feelings and needs have personally shifted. Some of this struggle influenced my ability to explore other relationships that have met my needs on a more holistic level. However, I still argue that Black women are socialized to protect and take care of Black men at all costs, but this sentiment is not reciprocated. Cynthia and I connected on this concept and discussed our common experiences with navigating the cultural expectation that we seek relationships with Black men when in the past these relationships have not always met our needs. Still, the desire to be in community with Black men and the concern for their well-being is magnified and a still-ever-present in our personal lives.

Dream

Dream grew up in a small town in the south in a family that was Nigerian and religious. Though Dream noted her family was very strict because of these dynamics they were still progressive. For instance, Dream being queer was accepted in her family, as it was believed "that's just the way you are." Still, Dream's identity in the context of values and ethics were shaped by her developing Christian identity at the time. When Dream was 14 she realized she was in love with her best friend and began to worry what her church family would say. This experience, realizing she was a Black woman in love with another woman, ushered in her understanding of her intersectionality for the first time. The balance of navigating her religious self with her Black woman identity proved to be a unique journey. Dream recognized her identity was different from those around her. According to Dream,

> Everybody around us was poor, everybody around us was Black, but not everybody around us felt the same way I did about other people. . . . I think at

> 14 years old, that's when I thought, oh wow, my identity is different and somehow I need to exist in this space in order to be affirmed.

This mature way of processing her life permeated Dream's activism. She was always thinking about the perception of others and in essence that framed how she showed up to do the work.

Others first. [redacted] the first thing is [redacted] what affects the most [redacted] people [redacted] you can't really divide that. It's dependent on the situation. [redacted] on the context. [redacted] the most at risk person in the room [redacted] thinking about intersecting [redacted] identities [redacted] I can't divide . . . [redacted] thinking about social injustices. [redacted] try to not center myself [redacted] center others, [redacted]

Dream's artistic story. Dream chose to write a poem for her artistic story (see Figure 4). Her poem used imagery to symbolize feelings taking care of everyone else in her activism. She recognized that her issues were going unaddressed in her work but her focus centered the needs of everyone else.

> My process, it really stemmed from our conversation yesterday . . . I . . . was like really reflecting on where I was as a young activist who did race-based activism and that was all I could do. That was all I could see. That's how I was trained. Even though I had so much pain of my own, I could not see my own pain and my own means. I could see everyone else. When we think about activism and why we do activism and why we're involved, that's an internal process. It may be externally what we do to push these things back but when we're reflecting and we're contemplating on why we're doing things, to me that's reflection and that's within. . . . I want to envision a world where people can coexist without pain. I envision a world where I can see not only where they stand but where I can see people being later on. In this oppressive game, we're all kind of victims of it, some of us more than others at different levels and I totally understand that. How do I explain it? I think I'm able to see as a

young activist, everyone else's struggle, but I haven't thought about my own self yet, I think is the easiest way to understand that.

My eyes were closed.
My eyes were closed, and yet I
Could see everyone else.

My eyes were closed.
My eyes were closed, and yet I
had vision to see or to seek.

My eyes were closed.
My eyes were closed, and yet
I could see the outline of the
mountains.

My eyes were closed.
My eyes were closed, and yet I
Can see everyone else, envision

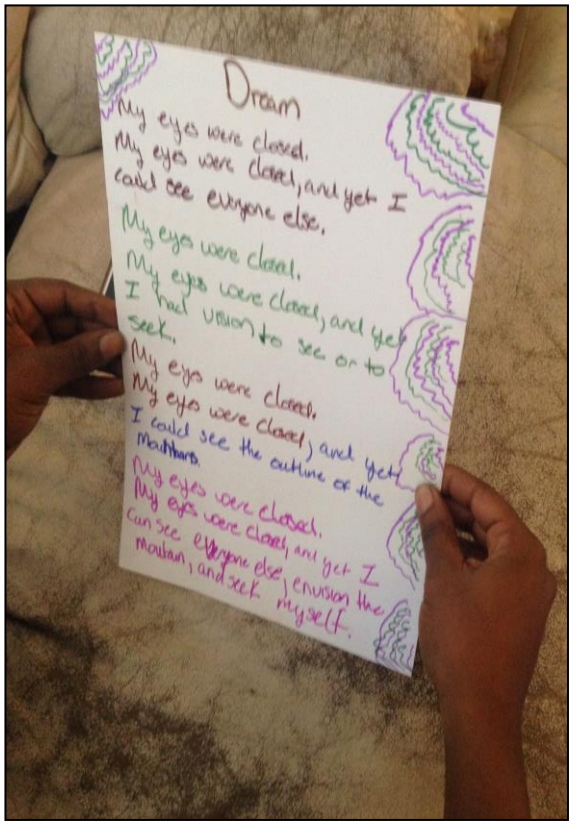

Figure 4. Dream's artistic story (2019).

As Dream and I continued our discussion it was clear that she was processing and understanding her feelings in the same moment as we were talking during the interview. At one point throughout our discussion Dream seemed to be externally processing almost as if I was not present. Dream looked off to one side and said out loud something like "yeah, I wonder" to no one in particular. I almost asked her to repeat herself but instead chose to sit back. Instinctually I knew she was having a private conversation, and I happened to be lucky enough to be a fly on the wall. The

beauty in this moment was a powerful example of what I had hoped this research would do: provide a space for the women I interviewed to reflect. All too often Black women are charged with having the answers for others, doing the work for others, and centralizing others. Each person was able to have a moment to pause and focus on their own concerns and to express deeply rooted feelings that have long been suppressed. In the moment of the research I felt as though I was fulfilling a purpose of creating space for this acknowledgment of each participant. Creating this space was culturally and spiritually significant. In essence, the work became somewhat of a liberatory practice. If I had not rejected expectations to remove myself as researcher from the research, I would not have been able to connect with participants in a way that allowed these women to tap into their own stories. Moreover, the artistic story further created comfort and in some ways removed hardened structures that often hinder deep dialogue.

Ella

Ella, a biracial Black woman, had a winding journey to understanding her identity. Growing up in a military family, Ella knew of her multiple identities but clung to her Black identity when she returned to the States. She expressed that she wanted " to be as Black as I think I can be." For Ella, this meant dressing a certain way and as she said "to fall into the culture." Prior to moving to the United States, Ella did not have a large context of her Black identity. She resisted being German but embraced her Black womanhood. However, while taking a class focused on the United States Constitution with conversations on Hitler and World War II, she recalled stories from her grandmother about fleeing the country. Understanding how her family believed and hearing the hardship her grandmother's family endured during the war

shaped Ella's feelings. Soon she began to reassess her identity and accepted being part German.

Education remained a stronghold for Ella and often provided space to reevaluate her thinking about her self-identity. While taking another course, she learned about White privilege. Though she believed that she didn't necessarily have White privilege, she did recognize that she at least had light skin privilege from which she benefited. For a short time she wondered if this would change her credibility and would she be considered Black enough. However, this concern did not last for long. Along her journey to understanding, Ella began to own both her Blackness and Whiteness, but proclaimed that she "won't neglect the other side just to amplify the other."

What about us? [redacted] I used to be all about saving the little Black boys. [redacted] that was my goal [redacted] I'm gonna save all these little Black boys. [redacted] then maybe the whole Black race can be uplifted [redacted] stronger families, Black women won't be as depressed [redacted] [redacted] the children, break the cycle of poverty. [redacted] Save the Black boys, save everybody.

[redacted] my advisor caught wind of that [redacted] [redacted] brought in a new book just for me [redacted] about girls [redacted] in the school to prison pipeline. [redacted] it hit me then [redacted] [redacted] screw the little Black boys. [redacted] They have this whole initiative out there, [redacted] what about [redacted] Black girls?

Their voices aren't being heard. [redacted]

[redacted]

Ella's artistic story. Ella chose to create a painting as her artistic story (see Figure 5). She reflected that during the first interview she was able to find solidarity, as we connected over similar experiences of the graduate experience, being a Black women and our commitment to social justice work. She communicated that the process affirmed for her that her feelings were real and not only experienced by her but by other Black women. Additionally, she found the entire interview process to provide a space for her to learn more about the research process, have reflection, and get support.

> After you provided the opportunity at the end of the interview to ask you any questions, your response made it feel like, "Okay, so I'm not crazy, and I'm not the only one that's going through these things, or have the thoughts, or the feelings that I do." So even though I know these problems exist, it's still different when you can put a face on it with another person. I mean, as awful as it is, it still felt good to know that I'm not making all of these things up in my head. You know, Black women are alone in facing these shitty things.

Figure 5. Ella's artistic story (2019).

Ella was very intentional with her artistic story. She chose to purchase items on her own for the project. She brought with her different sized canvases that were painted with purple and white paint. She said she chose purple as her "shout out to Alice Walker," a sly recognition of the famous Walker novel, *The Color Purple*, but was also careful not to let the colors run into each other as she said, "I better not see anything that might look like lavender in here when I mix it with white." This stanch desire to keep the colors separate as an ode to Walker made me recall the novel and movie. I wondered if Ella in her own way was giving a call out to the complicated family dynamics that were outlined in Walker's vision. Perhaps Ella was connected to the richness of the color purple and its common meaning of royalty, a nod to the royalty of Black people. Either way, I noted that Ella's mention of the colors was significant, even if she did not fully communicate it. As Ella recounted her process of creating her artistic story, it was clear she wanted to create art, not just a component of research. Through her description Ella indicated what each canvas represented, how the colors were used, and the order in which she laid the overall artwork out before us. Though answering the prompt through her art, Ella's description foretold another story, one of how she completes her work. Ella's activist process seemed to reflect recurring ideas I heard in other interviews about how the work must be done, a concept that permeated Ella's conversation. Ella reflected that she was also able to realize that she puts a lot on herself for no reason. Instinctively Ella piles on the work, saying,

> I don't have to necessarily take a full load of school courses and work full-time, and deal with a full-time family. I don't have to do it, but for whatever reason, I still choose to put all these different burdens on me when I don't have to. I still have choices and this is what I chose to do.

Her epiphany perhaps alludes to the expectation for Black women to work tirelessly and get as much work done as possible. Still, completing the artistic story Ella allowed herself to slow down and she "just sat here and watched paint dry." For a few moments Ella put on the pause button and centered herself in completing her artistic story, providing time to understand herself in another way. Still, Ella talked about how she thought she had done a rushed job on the project; that in "real-life" she would have spent more time, colored the sides of her canvases more fully. The idea that work could have been done better, more precisely, is a concept that resonated with me. I found that even in conducting this research I constantly questioned was I doing the work right. I feared that my personal desire of allowing this research to be my branch into doing scholar activist work was not going to be fulfilled. This fear was solely based on perfectionist ideas coupled with intense feelings of the deep responsibility I had with sharing my participants' stories. I wondered if Ella felt similar pressure. I asked if the desire for her artistic story to have, as she suggested a "cleaner look" was symbolic of her activism. She ruminated,

> It could be. . . . I take a lot of pride in my work . . . I can feel, I don't know, feelings, like connecting all of this because to me it was like, "I'm just painting, and this is what I like, and this is what it means to me," but yeah. It didn't connect how . . . like how I paint reflects on who I am so that's . . . it's kinda like a, "Oh," moment.

My suggestion that Ella's meticulousness with painting being reflective of her activist work, was a connection that Ella had not previously made. In the moment it seemed that Ella silently digested my implication. Much like other ponderings, we both made throughout the conversation, this was one instance that Ella internalized the information and took it with her to process later. Throughout our time together, there were several moments of new understandings and reflections for both Ella and myself.

I left her knowing that the processing would not stop that day, but would unravel for days afterward.

Faye

Faye grew up in Chicago in a strong Christian family in the late 1960s early 1970s. Her immediate family and her faith community were integral in shaping her understanding about her identity. However, Faye noted that she often received mixed messages about being Black and a woman. Nightly news discussed the high levels of Black crime. However, stories about Black people being descendants of kings and queens along with the stories of the strength of Black people due to their survival of slavery were also present.

Still, Faye said Black women were pigeonholed into a specific track. They could become teachers, social workers, or nurses, but were not groomed for scientific, technical, engineering, and mathematical careers.

Growing up Faye had all Black teachers and did not interact with White people. Eventually though Faye went to predominantly White institutions. She began to recognize the assumptions being made about her abilities from White instructors. In one situation she sought help from a White statistics faculty member. Faye felt he imagined she came from a poor academic background and was not able to succeed in his class. Later, she discovered that several students were struggling in the class, which the professor never shared. Faye felt she was being perceived as less than and never returned to the professor for help. Though she was successful in the course, the experience resonated with her because it made clear the messages she was being taught.

> There's a presumption that you're a girl, so you can't do this or you should go here and do that. And that you know, you're African American so you're less intelligent. You don't have parents that love you and support you. And I had two parents and grandparents and cousins, you know, that loved and supported me.

The idea of connecting family, and the multiple definitions of that, was central to Faye's ideas of activism. For her the central component was the lack of access for Black men. As a Black woman she felt it was important to push forth this issue despite her own experiences in the educational system.

Our responsibility. [redacted] you can't separate me. I am my brother's keeper. [redacted] as a Black woman. This affects me. Their lack of [redacted] access [redacted] to obtain [redacted] those degrees [redacted] affects me as a woman! It affects their children, their daughters, [redacted] mothers. [redacted] wives. [redacted] [redacted] what's happening to my brothers [redacted] But I do believe this affects me as a Black woman. [redacted] we're family [redacted] they're not in college, I don't interact with them [redacted], it's unfair [redacted] our communities, [redacted] our future. [redacted] [redacted] concerned about the next generations. [redacted] [redacted] educational attainment [redacted] it affects, [redacted] wealth, [redacted] health, [redacted] As a Black woman you've got to carry your brother [redacted].

Faye's artistic story. Almost immediately Faye was resistant to creating an artistic story. Even though all participants were told about this second step of the process ahead of time, Faye seemed to still have some hesitancy about being creative. Even as I detailed the items that were available for use, Faye seemed to become increasingly uncomfortable. After some reassurance that the art was another way to reflect, that the work would not be accessed for artistic ability, and that I just wanted her to create whatever came to her, Faye dove in (see Figure 6). As she began to explain what she created, it was clear that the prompt previously provided sent Faye into a space of deep reflection.

> I thought about this, you know, after I got the prompt, but this goes back to what I said earlier about our belief, my worldview prompted by my experience, personal experiences that Africa is the beginning, it's where life began, the continent of Africa, and that we've carried the world on our backs, on our shoulders. I thought about putting something on her head, I thought about kind of things about the Black woman, but everything that came in this world came through a woman. That may be abstract to some people, but everything that's ever been created . . . came from a human being. The doctor, the scientist . . . all of those people came through a woman. We give birth, we give life to every person on the planet, and in my work as a race-based activist, I feel like I'm carrying my students on my back, trying to make sure that they get to where they need to go. As a student, I feel like I'm carrying the message that I'm working towards now in my dissertation to try to get people to understand, so I feel like it's almost like my back, like I'm carrying. I'm a carrier of a message.

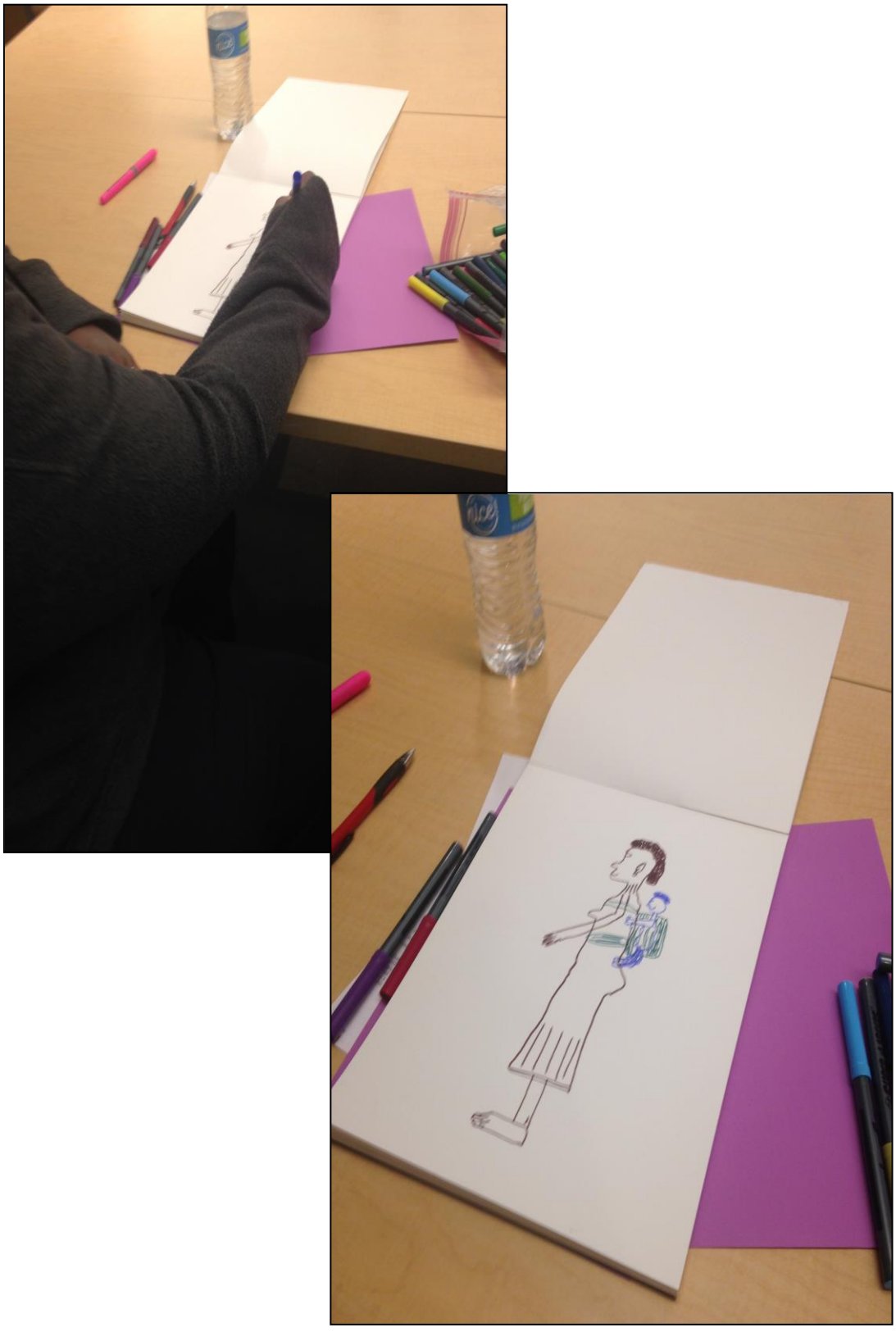

Figure 6. Faye's artistic story (2019).

Faye's processing about doing race-based activism suggested that Black women were the center of everything and the birth mothers of it all. She discussed feeling the extra burden of carrying others or the weight of the world on our shoulders. This resonated with me. My own artistic story focused on the idea of feeling like I had to "take care of the babies," meaning that there is an expectation in race-based activism that Black women will take care of it all; any loose ends that need tied up will be taken care of by us. Looking at Faye's picture, we had similarly used the images of babies to represent carrying more than our share of the work.

> Sometimes women take care of babies that are not theirs, or they carry people. . . . So, she's still going, you know, when they were in the fields in the South, they would carry babies and they would be in the fields with their babies on their backs, so this is not just African, this is talking about America's heritage, too. . . . I feel very strongly about us carrying messages, carrying people, carrying the next generation, carrying traditions, carrying our voices.

Faye's focus on Black women being "carriers" reflected the historical tradition of Black women's work in activist movements, which sparked a feeling of frustration and exhaustion in me. The themes she presented were not new but instead a continuous repeated track. When I asked Faye about the experience of creating her art, she stated that it was stressful. When I probed further she said, "I feel good about it, because I had thought about how it would portray what I feel is important to me in my journey as a Black doctoral student female, so this is a mixture between academics and other things." However, her original insistence that the process was stressful felt like a Freudian slip. I did not feel she was purely commenting on the research process, but that she was also commenting on her experience as a Black doctoral student female, a feeling I understood too well.

Kathy

Growing up, Kathy's adoptive parents helped her develop a strong Black and Christian identity that she embraced. However, understanding her biracial identity took longer. In the beginning Kathy's Christian identity was not her choice, but an expectation. Eventually it was a chosen identity that resonated for her. She believed that through various experiences her other identities were shaped as she examined things that came up and processed her connection to them. Kathy mentioned that originally the culture of higher education was not something she connected to. She was a high school dropout and the educational process was an experience that seemed peculiar to her. Becoming a non-traditional student, Kathy started college at 28. It seemed Kathy had some interesting processing around her sexuality and mentioned that as a teenager she questioned this identity. In particular she suggested that she did not know how to deal with issues and pains in her life, and she believed she placed the blame on men. Kathy believed she took time trying out and nurturing aspects of identity to see what she connected to. Perhaps this processing led to Kathy's passion around mental health. She strongly believed that Black people experienced trauma differently and in relation with higher education. She was concerned how Black girls were being perceived in predominately White spaces, noting that behaviors were being misunderstood and in turn labeling these girls in negative lights.

Accent the positive. [redacted] Black women mental health, [redacted] I just feel like Black people [redacted] They experience trauma differently. [redacted] our trauma comes from just being Black. [redacted] those experiences. [redacted] I'm always thinking [redacted] my girls, my

students [redacted] thinking about [redacted], “What does the heart of a little broken Black girl look like?” [redacted] for myself, [redacted] I think [redacted] these institutions, [redacted] predominantly white spaces, being very misunderstood, [redacted] labeled as having attitude, [redacted] angry [redacted] it’s really the baggage [redacted] with them [redacted] their experiences. [redacted] we talk about that enough [redacted] there is a difference, [redacted] different [redacted] treatment needed [redacted] [redacted]. [redacted], they always think [redacted] from a deficit mindset. [redacted] talk about education, they think, [redacted] Black folks [redacted] struggle [redacted] because they’re not prepared [redacted] opposed to, “They’re [redacted] bringing [redacted] rich experiences, [redacted] they may need extra support [redacted] never talk about that from a positive perspective [redacted] a strength space perspective [redacted] always from a deficit mindset.

Kathy’s artistic story. During our conversation Kathy talked about the many layers of wanting or needing to be silent. Sometimes silence was a defense mechanism, other times it was protection of energy. As Kathy shared her artistic story, the theme of silence and how she saw it impacting her interactions in race-based activism was very clear (see Figure 7).

> When it comes to the Audre Lorde quote [Your silence will not protect you], I think that’s something I always try to remind myself because I spend a lot of time, I’ve always been in predominantly White spaces and I’ve always been the eyeball in those spaces. So I spent a lot of time being silent, because I was thinking that equaled safety for me. But then I realized that even when I’m silent, I was still looked at it in a certain way, or I would still be viewed in a certain light. So whether I was silent or speaking up, they were gonna treat me

> the same way, so I found that it was a waste of time to be silent. . . . I cannot be silent even though sometimes I still want to be.

Though Kathy had a desire to speak her truth, it was still exhausting. Throughout our conversation she also discussed the navigation of racial battle fatigue, saying other Black people were tired as well. The constant stress of managing oppression and White supremacy on a regular basis was very present in Kathy's reflection of her activist work. However, she often felt that when it was time for work to get started, there was resistance that stalled progression.

> Too many are talking, but no one is listening. So I think that's where I struggle sometimes, especially with advocacy and things like that. Because we have a lot of voices talking, but sometimes those that are talking aren't listening to the voices and we're not working together, we all have an agenda. So sometimes that can bring that same exhaustion of wanting to be silent, because there's already too many voices in the room.

Many times I have believed that in spaces of activism there are particular voices that get lifted over others. We believe that certain voices have more value, more authority, or seniority, which leaves less seasoned activists no room to speak up. However, if we let others speak, new visions and plans could emerge while discussions on intersectionality could also take place. Kathy noted that she believed that all her activism was race-based activism because race was often at the core of her work.

> Everything is race-based advocacy to me, because race is usually at the bottom of the barrel, but is an issue within every battle. . . . If we look at LGBTQ+ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer] . . . that in itself is an issue. But then if . . . you look at the treatment of Black LGBTQ+ then that's a different issue. . . . We can't bubble things as a whole, it just doesn't work that way. So to me, race-based has to be involved in everything.

Figure 7. Kathy's artistic story (2019).

Michelle

Michelle, a Black cisgender woman, grew up in an uncommon military family. Her mother was an officer and her dad a school principal. In her younger years Michelle attended school on the military base and noted that the school was pretty diverse, which was unique. However, on the weekends her family would often go to brunch at the Officers' Club, which was starkly White compared to her school classrooms. Recognizing this difference started Michelle's understanding of identity though she wasn't able to put language to her experience. However, while in college Michelle had experiences that caused her to reevaluate her Blackness. Other Black students reminded her she was different because her family had money and that her parents were still together. According to her peers, these characteristics were uncommon and as Michelle believed did not make her Black enough.

I step back. I think I often self-exclude myself. [redacted] I think because I am so hyper-aware of [redacted] my SES background [redacted] access [redacted] I feel [redacted] my experience is not common. [redacted] I feel that my perspective [redacted] my perspective is so far from the majority [redacted] I [redacted] pull back [redacted] become [redacted] an active listener versus an active participant. [redacted] that's something I grapple with [redacted] realizing that I had access to and [redacted] acquired capital that allows me to navigate spaces with [redacted] ease. I'm strategic [redacted] with what I wear, where I went to school [redacted]. [redacted] I feel

like [redacted] this capital through my parents' work and effort [redacted].

[redacted] I think it has done a disservice to me[redacted] it's something I still grapple with.

[redacted] I think [redacted] activist spaces [redacted] still treat certain groups as a monolith, [redacted] if we [redacted] acknowledge [redacted] people are very diverse and come from [redacted] diverse experience [redacted] it makes things more difficult, [redacted] it's easier to treat issues [redacted] as the same for everyone, and they may not be. [redacted] I've gotten so used to [redacted] putting my needs aside. It just becomes second nature, [redacted]

Michelle's artistic story. My conversation with Michelle during our second interview started with us finalizing discussion we could not fully get to in our previous interview. We started our doctoral programs at similar times and were impacted by the numerous and repetitive killing of Black people that were happening during the crux of #BlackLivesMatter (BLM) activism. Michelle noted that her institution made a statement about the shooting that happened at Pulse Night Club around the same time, like many other institutions had in support of LGBTQ+ communities. However, that same support or acknowledgment was not present for those who lost their lives from police violence. Like Michelle, I felt this disconnect from university acknowledgment of what was happening around police violence and the trauma this inflicted on Black people. I recalled feeling perpetually stuck and in constant fear as I negotiated my surroundings in a rural town. As a student affairs professional, Michelle took

advocacy to another level by contacting an associate vice president and communicating her concern that the university did not respond to the police violence. She stated this was particularly important as faculty and staff were in pain and expected to support students during this time. Michelle's actions sat heavy with me. Though I had complete admiration for her gumption, I equally felt sadness as she put her feelings aside to step into advocacy. I wondered if this concept would show up in her depiction of her artistic story, indeed it did (see Figure 8).

> I first started off just writing words, and then . . . I don't know . . . I like the idea of the woman with the Afro, but then having different aspects of Black women. So, "resilience, listeners, striving for excellence, proud, teacher, superwomen, by any means necessary, eternally exhausted, calling out but also calling in, code switching, magic." Then I thought about this phrase that I saw on Twitter a few months ago . . . "Fuck it, I'll do it," [signed] Black women. I saw it first after the Alabama election for the Senate seat or the House seat, and I was like, "Yeah, that's pretty much Black women." Whenever things go wrong, instead of complaining about it, just kind of that grind or the hustle, and just being like, "Eff it, I'll do it," so to speak. I just feel that really encapsulates everything that it means to really be a Black woman. So, even relating to the women's march or the Black Lives Matter movement, that really just sums it up.

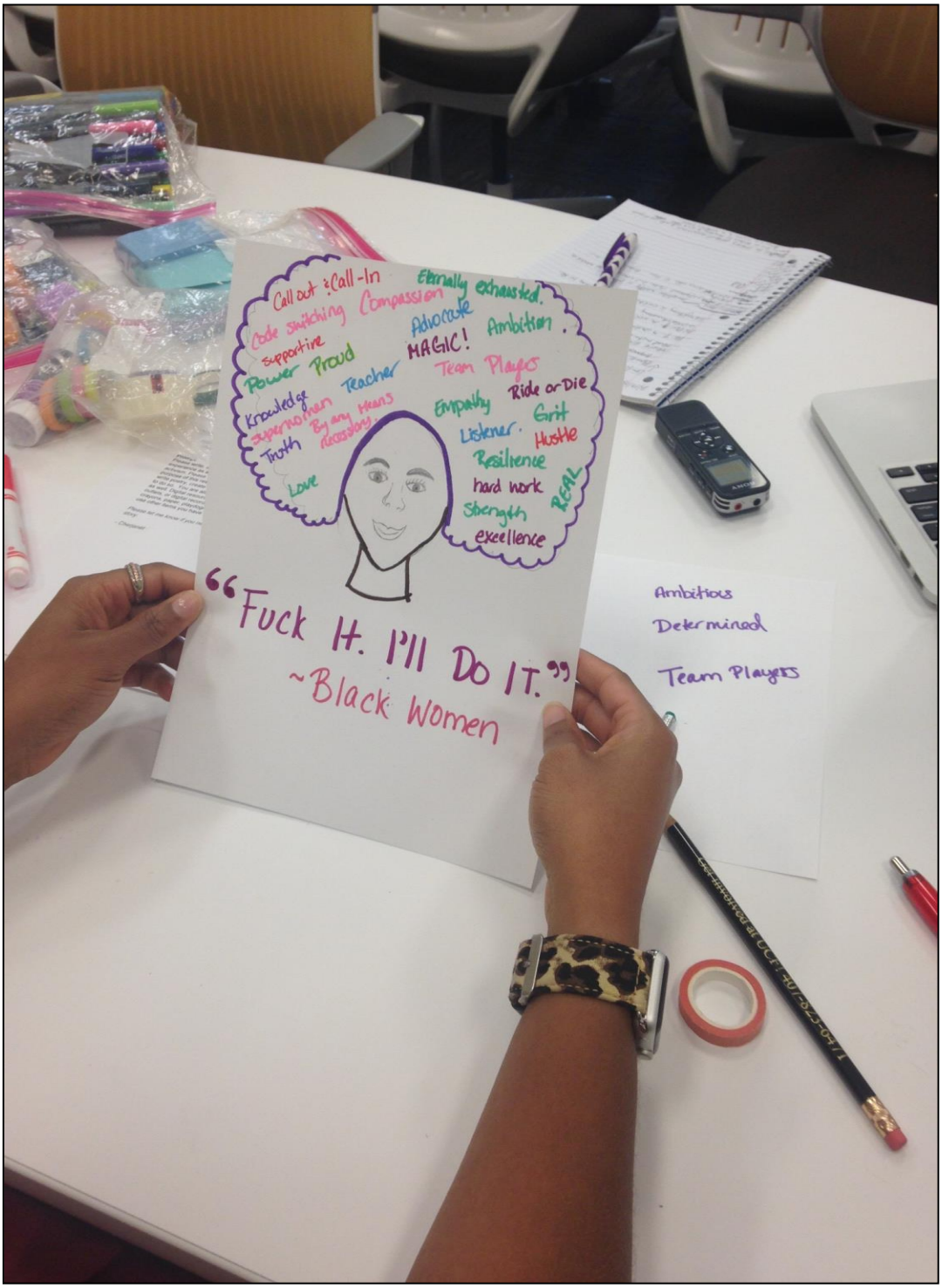

Figure 8. Michelle's artistic story (2019).

Unfortunately, I completely agreed with Michelle. I believed there is this constant expectation or innate tendency for Black women to always be the educators, the fixers, and the savers in times of activism. Michelle and I unknowingly found solace in our brokenness and sisterhood in our pain. Our connection was facilitated by our socialization as Black women to bare the weight of expectation from our communities and to keep pushing. I hoped that our bond would remain after our time together, but how to maintain a friendship rooted in experiences with trauma? We continued our discussion and began to make the deeper connections to intersectionality. The trauma we shared was not just rooted in racial oppression but also spanned sexism as well.

> "Fuck it, I'll do it." I feel like so much of it. Right? . . . on the one hand when it comes to Black women there's either something that's related to their race, or there's something that's related to our sex. You know what I mean? There's no days off, so to speak. So, there's no time to complain about it or whine about. Just take a deep breath, "All right. Let's do it." That overall resilience . . . I think that's what it really means when it comes to the topic of intersectionality and Black women, is that there are no days off, right? There's always something, be it an attack as a woman or an attack as a Black person. I think just from the very beginning of our ancestors being brought over here . . . no time off . . . Black men, sometimes they can take off because of their gender, right, with the male privilege? Or let's say we flip the script and say with White women, they can take off when it comes to their race. But legitimately, there is . . . either I'm calling up about Planned Parenthood or I'm calling up about police brutality. Either way, there's something. So, it's just, "Fuck it, I'll do it" Just let me know who to call and where to show up.

Ms.

Ms. recalled attending school when she was young and having a teacher explain that she had three strikes against her. Being Black, poor, and female, according to the teacher, was going to be a problem. However, Ms. was not poor and her family preached a different story. It was a story of perseverance and achieving your desires. When sharing her teacher's sentiments with her family, Ms.'s parents

were angered and soon called the school board about the teacher's actions. Additionally, Ms.'s father, who was a factory worker and pastor, called other pastors to her home, exposing Ms. to community organizing. Soon, Ms. spoke in front of the school board with her parents and her teacher lost her job. This spawns a deeper look into the messaging Black students were getting from their White teachers.

Now a 20-year student affairs professional, Ms. has become an assistant vice president at her institution. Her area of work supports students from marginalized identities through advocacy and academic support. Identifying as a non-religious Christian, Ms. believed that her intersectionality was especially tied to her spirituality and as she called it her "faith-walk," and her "faith journey with God." Additionally she recognized that her marriage to a naturalized citizen from Haiti impacted her life as well, as she was tuned in to politics and its impact on her life. Moreover, Ms. spoke about how her unique roles, wife, mother, step-mom, assistant vice principal, etc., were often in conflict with each other. Specifically, she discussed that as a women of color in higher education that she was often guarded, battling stereotypes.

Bringing voice. [redacted] Everything seems to manifest itself as a black or white issue, [redacted] we forget [redacted] other cultures [redacted] are in the battle. [redacted] Black or Brown bodies [redacted] are being brutalized. Nobody [redacted] focuses on [redacted] women [redacted] being brutalized, [redacted] [redacted] there is so much work to be done around this subject [redacted] [redacted]. [redacted] people [redacted] jump on whatever bandwagon [redacted] we need to learn to be consistent [redacted] stay the course.

[redacted] there's not really a face of activism. [redacted] the Martins, and [redacted] the Malcolms. [redacted] the great names of the past. They emerge as the leader[redacted] easy to hide behind [redacted] social justice and activism today is [redacted] via Twitter, [redacted] Facebook, [redacted] social media platforms, [redacted] activism, [redacted] looks [redacted] different, [redacted] the direction that we need to go, [redacted] everybody can have a voice and be involved [redacted].

Ms.'s artistic story. Ms. chose to create a poem for her artistic story (see Figures 9 and 10). Her reflection on intersectionality seemed to intertwine with the collective experience of general intersections of identity. I recalled feeling the underlying concepts of intersectionality, which specifically and intentionally, call for us to problematize oppression, privilege, and power, was perhaps missing from Ms.' reflection. However, her thinking around the juggling of multiple roles and the different expectations of each was clear. This navigation was parallel to ideas expressed by other women I spoke with but materialized very differently. What did unfold was Ms' processing of the roles she had and how those roles provided different experiences with institutional power dynamics at play.

> I was reflecting on some of the questions you asked about intersectionality and identities and . . . how people see you and how you interact with others. . . . I thought . . . the academy, people call you a lot of things and you answer to a lot of titles. I'm known as professor . . . I'm known as [an] AVP [assistant vice president], I'm known as Momma . . . to some of my students. I'm known as Ms. . . . I think about all the titles that I answer to at this institution to be able to do my job, and they're all a part of my identity and they're all parts of me that intersect at times. And then I think about . . . the names that I answer to, I answer the call to serve, I answer the call to be the best mom and to be the best wife I can be, to be the best educator, to be the best friend that I can be. And so, I commit to the people, to being a servant leader, to being an informed

> leader, and to showing care and empathy every day. That's what's important to me, and I think, in our role, we are given a title but often at the academy we are thrust in to so many roles. My title is AVP and I'm a doctoral student and I'm doing all of this, but when people come to me, they come hurting. I'm a mother to some who are motherless, I'm a friend to some who are friendless. I'm a resource to some who are in search for something. So, as a woman of color in the academy, we wear a lot of hats, chosen and many of them unchosen, just because of who we are, a woman of color at a predominantly White institution.

Ms.'s processing about her multiple roles and the ownership she takes in the unspoken titles she is given made me think about my time as a diversity administrator in student affairs. Often the position required leadership at high-level meetings while also having strong intentional relationships with students. I remember thinking about the extra burden of being a Black woman in this role and the ways in which students of color found connection with me. The intimate details I would often know about students' lives propelled me to find ways to support them at all costs. Ms.'s experience in the assistant vice president role seemed to mirror my experience in many ways. Her role in senior leadership became her space of advocacy and activism. For me, this indicated the theme of Black women being the ones to take on more and more work and responsibilities because it needs to be done.

> When students see me, somebody said, "You can't leave, Ms. because we need you." The amount of pressure you feel when someone says that to you, but [in a] way you feel honored. . . . You feel like, yes, I'm here and I'm making a difference, I'm serving as a role model and a source of inspiration for the students, but it's like, ah, sometimes they don't know the costs you go through to be in the role and the political capital you lay on the line to do the role and to do it effectively while honoring yourself, while being true to what you believe in, while doing the job that they hired you to do.

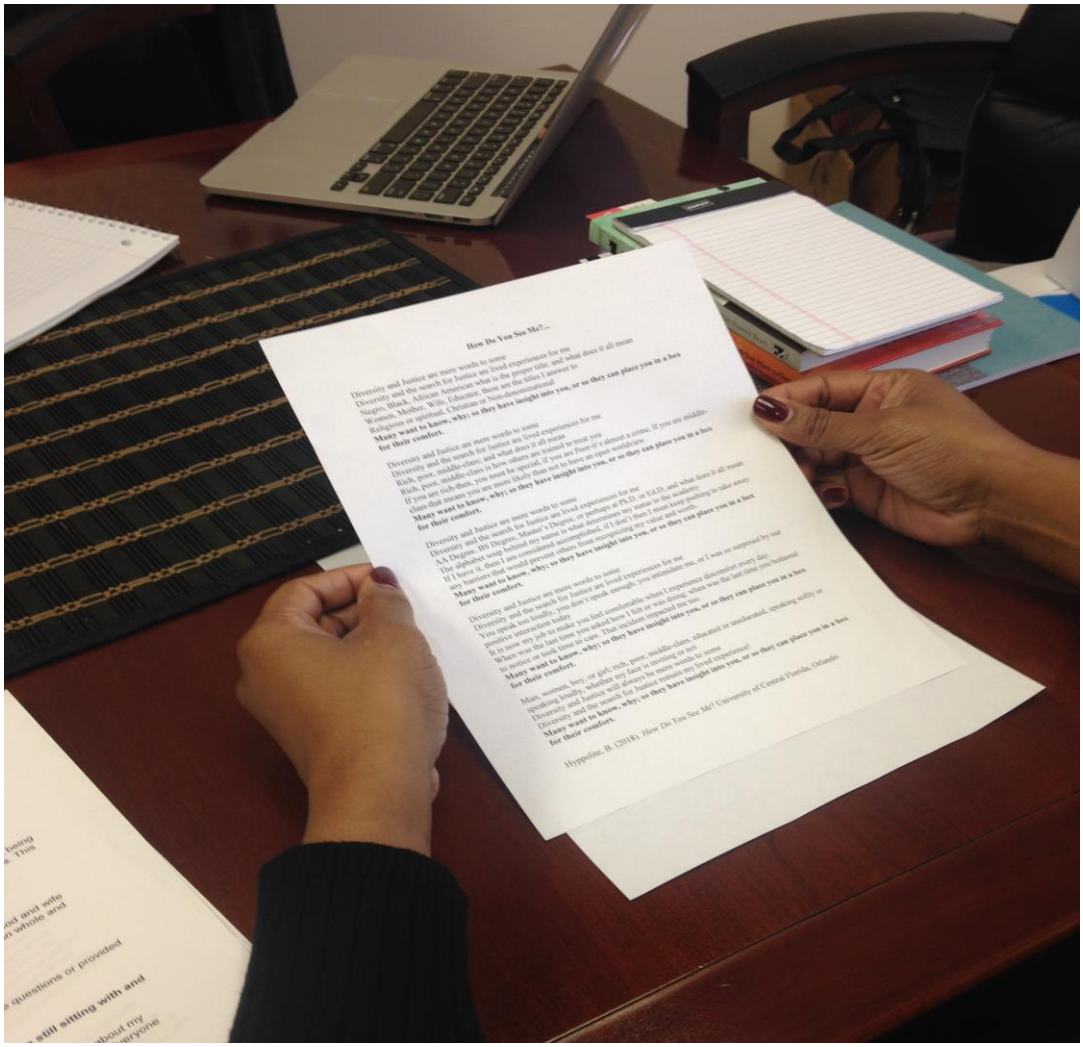

Figure 9. Ms.'s artistic story (2019).

How Do You See Me?

Diversity and justice are mere words to some. Diversity and the search for justice are lived experiences for me. Negro, Black, African American, what is the proper title, and what does it all mean? Mother, wife, woman, educator. These are the titles I answer to. Religious or spiritual, Christian or non-denominational
Many want to know, why? So they have insight in to you or so they can place you in a box for their comfort?

Diversity and justice are mere words to some. Diversity and the search for justice are lived experiences for me. Rich, poor, middle class. What does it all mean? Rich, poor, middle class is how others are trained to treat you. If you are rich, then you must be special. If you are poor, it's almost a crime. If you are middle class, that means you are more likely than not to have an open world view.
Many want to know, why? So they have insight in to you or so they can place you in a box for their comfort?

Diversity and justice are mere words to some. Diversity and the search for justice are lived experiences for me. AA degree, BS degree, master's degree, or perhaps a PhD or EdD, and what does it all mean? The alphabet soup behind my name is what determines my status in the academy. If I have it, then I'm considered accomplished and if I don't, then I must keep pushing to take away any barriers that would prevent others from recognizing my value and worth.
Many want to know, why? So they have insight in to you or so they can place you in a box for their comfort?

Diversity and justice are mere words to some. Diversity and the search for justice are lived experiences for me. You speak too loudly! You don't speak enough. You intimidate me. I was so surprised by our positive interaction today. It'' now my job to make you comfortable when I experience discomfort every day? When was the last time you felt how I felt or was doing? When was the last time you bothered to notice or took time to care? Hmm. That incident impacted me, too.
Many want to know, why? So they have insight in to you or so they can place you in a box for their comfort.

Man, woman, boy, or girl. Rich, poor, middle class. Educated or uneducated. Speaking softly or speaking loudly. Whether my face is inviting, or not. Diversity and justice will always be mere words to some. Diversity and the search for just remains my lived experience.
Many want to know, why? So they have insight in to you or so they can place you in a box for your comfort?

Figure 10. Ms.'s artistic story enlarged (2019). AA = associate degree, BS = bachelor of science, PhD = Doctor of Philosophy, EdD = Doctor of Education.

Zora

Zora, born into the Muslim faith, still considers religious practice a strong component of her ever-developing identity. In her youth it was commonplace to know and be around many people who were Black and Muslim. However, when Zora's family moved to another state, it changed. She began to experience her first instances with being othered around her religion and fully recognized this shift. When attending a small private liberal arts college, her Blackness was forced to the center of saliency. She noted it was always clear she was Black as her parents raised her with this pride. However, in college she sat next to a student in class who said "This is the closest I've ever been to a Black person." Awkward moments continued to recur as stereotypes emerged about what Black people from her major Midwest city were like. However, Zora's mother had a doctorate degree, which was quite a different narrative than was expected by her peers. Now a converted Christian, Zora is a single mom raising her son under this faith practice. She continuously navigates the challenges of being a full-time student and a mom, coming home from classes to then help her son with his homework.

When asked what she thought were pressing issues facing Black women today that she wished was considered in race-based activism, Zora noted issues around maternal health. Specifically she recalled interviews when athlete Serena Williams discussed concerns she had in hospitals as well as her own traumatic birth experiences. In Zora's opinion the mainstream conversations around Black women and childbirth mostly center on premature births but do not necessarily center other aspects of the birthing process.

Don’t leave them out. [redacted] For me, [redacted] I believe that our liberation is tied, [redacted] trans Black women. [redacted] a population that I care about and [redacted] I see [redacted] as women. [redacted] we often leave them out [redacted] I say that I’m concerned about the liberation of Black woman [redacted] . . . [redacted] I have to give myself grace. [redacted]. But at the back of my mind, [redacted], “I forgot trans women.” [redacted] naming that [redacted] bringing [redacted] to the light [redacted] other mothering [redacted] we’re always trying to make sure everybody else is good [redacted] thinking about all of those things [redacted] I think . . . [redacted] race-based activism, [redacted] I’m a Black woman, everything that I do is race-based. [redacted]

Missing artistic stories from Andrea and Zora. Both Andrea and Zora were not able to do a second interview. Unfortunately, their artistic stories are missing from the overall reflection of this experience. I was disappointed that scheduling did not permit us to continue our dialogue. Both of these women had powerful messages and experiences they shared that could have gone more in-depth through the artistic

process. However, some of their sentiments can be gleaned from the stories of the other women who were able to participate.

Profile Summary

Each woman's profile chronicled the place each of the women were at in their individual journeys of identity, intersectionality, and the complex dynamics present in their relationship to family, community, and education. The murky jumbled spaces each person navigated colors the background of their activist identity. I found myself constantly challenged while speaking with all of the participants. Often I disagreed with the ideas that some of the woman shared and wanted to push back on their philosophies and political ideologies. In many ways my desire to argue with some woman was about holding on to specific ideas about how best to think about and solve the issues plaguing Black women. When a woman expressed opinions that I deemed connected to traditional ideas that regurgitated patriarchy and revered Black women as secondary and submissive, I struggled to see how these thoughts could be connected to activism. Still, I felt a since of reverence for each woman who I spoke with. During our conversation, I tried my best to honor their stories and listen and not indicate whether I agreed with them or not. I understood that though their story may not have been my own, there were many Black women who would resonate with their words. Instead I sought clarity and understanding of their views and provided space and time for the woman to just be. As our conversation continued I began to recognize that each woman's ideas were perhaps connected to their age, life experiences, and their personal stage of life. Some women had more safeguards to protect them from retaliation, while others needed to be more strategic with their execution. Eventually, I found parts of myself in each woman and learned a great deal from each of them.

The profiles detail how each woman understood their intersectionality and how they communicated their activism. This storytelling unfolded new discoveries that challenged the women in some ways and in other ways acted as a way to declare their beliefs out loud to a welcoming and affirming party. Many of the women commented that our time together was the first time they were able to solely focus on how they were impacted by their activist work and how their needs were not always served by the goals of their activism. In the moment this revelation acted as a reminder for some to find ways to center themselves in the work. For others this was a call to do some internal reflection about what was important and reassess long-held beliefs. Essentially the research process for the participants was indeed a liberatory process, with liberation having multiple definitions.

The Story Behind the Story: Emergent Themes

Throughout the process of analyzing the data for this research study, multiple themes emerged. The themes refer back to the original research questions in that they communicate how the women made meaning of their experiences in relation to their identities and connection to others. The research questions asked,

Q1 How do Black women doctoral students involved in race-based activism understand their intersectional identities?

Q2 How do Black women doctoral students involved in race-based activism believe their intersectional identities and the social injustices that impact these identities are addressed in current race-based activism?

Unfolding in the following pages are the overall conversation themes from the interviews. Often recognizing for the first time as a missing focus in activist work, these Black women shared their realities in an honest and unapologetic way.

In developing my own artistic story, the idea of taking a backseat while doing activist work came up. When I reflected on my feelings of being asked to put others first, to uplift Black men or to center the needs of the collective first, I had this deep feeling of being asked to take a back seat to the more important issues. As I talked with participants about their own experiences I found similar concepts appearing in their stories as well. The idea of taking a backseat was sometime very intentional and an act the women were aware they were doing. In other cases taking a backseat was not always realized. Either through being sent to the backseat by default or finding themselves in the back seat by accident due to the good work they were doing, unawareness played some role for some of the women. However, there were times throughout discussion with the women that taking a backseat was a form of purposeful activist strategy. Thus, the emergent themes, unconscious back-seating and conscious back-seating, were born. In further examination it also became evident that each theme materialized in distinct ways that could be further grouped into subthemes. Unconscious back-seating covered the concepts socialized to serve, fear of isolation, and bringing other voices, while conscious back-seating added "Fuck it! I'll do it." In this section I detail how these ideas showed up in our conversations. The distinct subthemes communicated the actions and activities that the women engaged according the main theme they fall under. It seemed necessary to separate these ideas to communicate the level of intentional verses socialized behavior the participants were embracing.

Unconscious Back-Seating

Participants seemed to not recognize that they situated others' issues in activism before they focused on the issues that impacted them more intimately. When

asked when they could or should be centralized in this work, most participants never thought about it and/or did not even realize they were leaving themselves out of the discussion. There was a consistent focus on just getting work done in activist work. Whether taking care of logistical needs or simply wanting to make sure that momentum was maintained, Black women just got to work.

Socialized to serve. Participants discussed that they felt the need and/or had a responsibility to work to make things better for their communities. This meant that almost innately when joining organizations, they volunteered to do the behind-the-scenes work of activism. In many ways, however, the socialization to do the work seemed to be second nature to many of the women. Not recognizing that their roles had become to do the groundwork in activist circles by taking care of technical and logistical needs, some Black women just became used to it. In essence they always did what they had always done. Michelle, in particular, discussed this idea. She did not internalize the act of doing this work as problematic per se, just par for the course. "I think I've gotten used to doing it that I don't even think of it as putting my needs aside. It just becomes second nature, if you will, to me."

In conversation with my participants I shared some of my story as we were connecting and bonding on shared experience. I began to share how I had found socialization of my Black womanhood that aligned with several other women's stories in the study.

> I think Black women are taught to be of service. So I think that we [say] . . . "What needs to be done? I'll do it. . . . My issues aren't important, as long as you're taken care of." And I think it's all connected . . . mental health . . . I think it's so super important for us to take care of ourselves, but I think Black women, we take on so much and we don't even realize that we're doing it, because it's just in our nature to just do it. And then we're suffering, and then

> when we really have a chance to stop and think about all the ways we've been impacted, it hurts. So I think we keep moving so we don't deal with the hurt.

Others agreed with this sentiment and in turn brought up concepts that had a historical connection. In particular we discussed how at the core of social justice work there is often this desire to care for others. For Black women this often looked like a centering of those persons before ourselves. Zora processed this thinking and noted that she thought this tendency was tied to "other mothering."

> I appreciate you naming that and bringing this to the light because I also think about what role does other mothering play in it and like we're always trying to make sure everybody else is good where meanwhile like my hair is . . . it's going gray, right?

Fear of isolation. Black women took a back seat out of fear from isolating themselves from others. While doing the work of activism, perhaps because of cultural norms or personal philosophy, there was a necessity to be in community doing the work. For some the belief was that the best way to keep the community in tact was to not cause dynamics within the group to change or to shift the temperature in the room. The ideas of doing the most good for the most people seemed present for many of the women. Situated in cultural norms, supportive needs for the community collective were ever present. Zora recalled not wanting to bring up different issues in her work as to not shift the focus in a non-productive way.

> There's this fear if I bring this up it might either isolate myself or am I going to take us down a path that I don't really have the energy for. So, there's always this compromise I think of you don't want to say it but just wait or consider something else. I guess that goes back to . . . caring for others versus myself first. So, how do we choose? It's a constant battle to pick and choose at what point do you say this also matters?

Similarly, Dream felt like she received messages that you have to not push too much and to go with the flow if you want to remain in community. Often there was a

compartmentalizing of self, activist work in one space, and everything else in another. Additionally, Dream felt that being likeable was important and that impacted how she showed up in activist spaces.

> For a number of years, I separated what I needed to do from who I was, so I became two separate beings . . . school became mine, [and then there was the] work that I did outside . . . I realized over time I had never thought about myself. I had never thought about myself . . . they tell you if you want someone to like you, you don't rock the boat by talking about your issues. I don't rock the boat by talking about what I need. I don't rock the boat.

Just as Dream expressed wanting to keep things calm and not be troublesome, similar sentiments kept some of these women from voicing their needs and concerns in activist spaces. It would seem these women were doing activist work to fulfill the desires of the Black community, which were not focused on Black women. Many of the women discussed that regardless if they felt that issues were being left off the table or that there was information being missed, they did not always bring it up. The women repeatedly expressed the action of putting issues off for another time; however, the appropriate time never arrived.

Bringing other voices. The act of Black women unconsciously putting themselves in the back seat has noble underpinnings. Understanding that those with privileged identities have responsibility to share their power to create justice was embraced by many of the women. Choosing to find ways to center or incorporate the voices of those with the most marginalized identities in activist work was a task several women discussed. By centering the voices of others, these women chose to take focus from themselves and place the attention on others. Zora seemed to almost have remorse for not being able to do this more frequently. She also recognized that there were still groups that she still wanted to bring focus to but would miss. She

talked about this experience while also trying to give herself grace for not always getting it right.

> I identify strongly as a Black woman and I believe that our liberation is tied [but] I'm always missing someone. So, as you were talking, I was like, "Oh, I'm not thinking about trans Black women." That's a population that I care about . . . I see them as women. But, I feel like we often leave them out. . . . So, how can I say that I'm concerned about the liberation of Black women [and leave them out] so that for me, it's like my check for myself of like Ah! So I'm kind of contributing to this, but I have to give myself grace. I'm telling myself I'm trying to do so much. . . . But at the back of my mind, I'm like, "I forgot trans women."

Zora felt the pressure to be the one who pushed the group on the inclusion of others in the conversations. She perhaps felt guilty that she was not doing a good enough job. Beyond feelings of inadequacy, Zora sometimes felt she had to decide when and if she would bridge the topic of bringing other voices due to focusing on her own personal self-care. Recognizing that not everyone she was working with was as versed in certain topics, she decided to pick and choose her battles when it came to how she discussed different topics in activist spaces.

> One of the biggest things … about considering the needs of Black trans women and getting in to the conversation about people . . . they got so caught up in terminology and who gets to decide who's a woman and then I had to realize that because I do this work, it just is common. . . . I don't want to say common sense but just natural for me and then trying to engage with people who don't understand or don't have the language and just don't see this as a priority. So, I've tried to keep injecting that in to the conversation but then I feel like it's so . . . there's so much that it needed to be something separate. . . . I felt like that was my need to center that or inject that because I'm like we can't talk about Black women, Black people and not talk about trans folks. I feel like because it's such a hard topic for some people to grasp, like I have felt like I've had to put it to the side for the sake of my sanity.

For Dream there was some frustration about the ability to have multiple topics focused on within activist work. She expressed that one-line thinking caused the scope

of the work to be narrow; therefore, she felt it was important to think about those missing voices in the conversation.

> It's like we can't coexist with ideas. If I try to bring those things up in a Southern Black Christian space that calls itself an activist space, then it's a problem. It wasn't until I feel like I came into my young womanhood that I was actually able to push these boundaries for myself. Especially in the South . . . in a reasonably small town . . . it was just like every time we'd have conversations, we can't have conversations about that because that offends someone. I have to always watch out for offending someone, as though oppressions don't coexist among each other. If we get rid of anti-Blackness that may connect us all, there's still these other oppressions that still coexist, that will still hold all of us down.

> Until we look at the person who is most at risk, that person will be trans, that person will probably not even [be] from the US, that person will not even [be] a US citizen, if we think about the person who is most at risk and center their needs, then we can all be free, I think, but no one talks about that in activist space. We talk about short-term goals and short-term fixes for this short-term happiness.

Dream's call out regarding narrowly focused activist platforms' inability to expand their scope perhaps speaks to a larger issue needing to be unpacked in activist work. However, the idea of considering the most vulnerable population in activist work is one that was shared by other participants. This notion again revisits sentiments about understanding the responsibilities of privileged identities and their relationship with power structures. Still, it seems there was not a mention of why these Black women felt it was specifically their responsibility to bring these voices to the forefront, just that it was important to them and is what Black women do.

Conscious Back-Seating

Many participants talked about letting those with the most vulnerability be centered in activist work. Though the participants defined what population they deemed as the most vulnerable differently, the common understanding was that they had to center other voices before their own. What was clear here was the intentionality

and certainty that this behavior was necessary along with personal awareness of efforts to take the backseat. Some concepts overlapped with unconscious back-seating such as the reasoning for the behavior. As discussed above, centering other voices was important to activist work for Black women in multiple ways. Though there was some unconscious action of centering other voices, some women seemed to be very conscious of this behavior and this, in turn, meant their issues took a back seat. Dream further discussed why centering other voices was something she made a part of her work. For her she was always focused on the collective good and seriously considering intersectionality. I noticed with Dream her reasoning for centering other voices was at times an unconscious act. However, as our discussion continued, there were moments when this back-seating became deliberate and intentional.

> When I first started . . . I would say who is most at risk in the room? Now as I've gotten older, I think about how that was still kind of blinding because people are lucky to make it into the room. . . . I think the first thing is I would think about what affects the most amount of people when I'm in the organization. That, to me, is you can't really divide that. It's dependent on the situation. . . . I always try to not center myself in that. I try to center others . . . I think about what is affecting trans women of color the most . . . I talk about trans women first, not because I feel like I have a lock on their experiences or their lived experiences, I talk about them the most because [trans women's experiences] were the first time I saw injustice differently that didn't affect me in my cisgender world in the same way. . . . I speak about them first because they're the first people I think about when I think about who needs to be center in activist spaces in any context when we're talking about intersecting identities. I think about what they need the most. . . . If you're not thinking about those things, if you're not thinking about how others may exist in the space, then what does it mean to really even speak of intersecting identities?

Faye also talked about being responsible to bring other voices to the forefront. However, she was especially focused on thinking about Black men's experiences. For Faye, as a Black woman she was charged with supporting Black men and making sure the injustices they faced got the attention it deserved.

> As a Black woman…you can't separate me. I am my brother's keeper. So this is important to me as a Black woman. This affects me. Their lack of ability to access college and to obtain those experiences and those degrees and that paper, affects me as a woman! It affects their children, their daughters, their sufferance. Their mothers. Their wives. . . . But I do believe this affects me as a Black woman . . . you know, we're family. . . . It affects our communities, it affects . . . our future. . . . As a Black woman you've got to carry your brother or your husband because . . . they're very smart . . . intelligent, lots of potential . . . but he just couldn't. . . . He didn't have the right supports. He didn't have the right . . . guidance.

Similarly, Butterfly talked about Black men being nearly absent from the industry she worked in before starting her doctoral studies. Though there were some Black women present, she particularly wondered about the Black men who were not found in key roles in her career path.

> In the [corporate industry] there were more Black females than males. . . . They were few, but still, there were more Black females in the [industry] than the males. Because I used to train new [industry professionals] in DC [District of Columbia], and when I would train these large classes, we'd find definitely more females than males. When I saw a Black male in the class, I was like, Wow.

It seemed Butterfly was still developing her activism and had just begun to make connections from her previous career and her current doctoral experiences. Still, her observation of the lack of Black men at work as we were discussing the experiences of Black women in activism was intriguing to me. Even when having carved time dedicated to a conversation about Black women in activism Butterfly, like others, focused on how Black men were impacted by oppression.

In conjunction with being conscious that they were taking a backseat to others was the idea that certain issues were taking a backseat because there was pressing work that needed to be done first. When these Black women felt the work or issues were not getting enough movement or key issues were not being addressed, the women collectively said, "Fuck it! I'll do it!" They moved with little hesitation to do

the hard work that seemed not to concern others. Andrea talked about the major responsibility that was on the shoulders of Black women who they seemed to have just been born into. For Andrea a Black woman's life was innately about advocacy.

> Being a Black woman means from the time you take your first breath, you have to advocate for yourself, and that is not a narrative that White women, White cisgender women, have to own. You enter into this world, and you are already afforded certain privileges. Even from the time that we are children, we are taught the narrative of being able to speak up for ourselves, when to speak, when not to speak, who to talk to, who to look at, who not to look at, the things that we should say in certain social settings. Even now, it's becoming more stringent on the actual language that were using in certain settings and how we can best accommodate other people's needs so that they can understand us from an objective perspective and instead of considering us angry or bitter or whatever it may be. We have to consistently change ourselves and advocate for ourselves in a way that society can be accepting of us, and that is what it means to be a Black woman.
>
> It is so deeply rooted and there are so many layers to being a Black woman that it's not. . . . When you say that I'm a Black woman or a White woman, it's not the same thing. Being a White woman does not contain the same amount of layers or the same levels of intricacy that means to be a Black woman in the United States. When it comes to not just simply advocating for ourselves but advocating for our communities, advocating for our men, and advocating for so many different issues that are happening within Black America, that is a responsibility that we have been carrying for centuries.

Andrea's thoughts communicated an overall internalized Black women's culture of always being the one to take on work. She understood her complex Black woman identity as including continual advocacy for herself and community.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter the Black women who participated in the research study were introduced. Each participant's profile communicated her perspective while giving a glimpse into her life. Many of the women's experiences in activism centered around the ideas of taking care of others while being of service. The major themes of unconscious back-seating and conscious back-seating shaped the main concepts the

women discussed in our conversations about their experiences in activism. These ideas were further categorized by subthemes and additionally situated the feelings expressed. Unconscious back-seating spanned multiple spaces for the Black women in conversation with me. Though their perspectives were somewhat different, there was a consistent focus on the idea that it was the Black women's responsibility to take care of others and center the needs of others. Whether this perspective focused on thinking about those on the margins or it was around pushing the boundaries in acts of resistance and power, Black women were holding up their communities. The subthemes of (a) socialized to serve (b) fear of isolation, and (c) bringing other voices expressed how these behaviors emerged.

Conscious back-seating showed up for the Black women as an intentional and deliberate choice to take the back-seat in activism. For some of the women this concept spanned thoughts of being the ones who bring conversations up in activism, support others, and take on actions that others refused to do. The subtheme "Fuck it. I'll do it," solidified this idea communicating that out of frustration some of the women would become tired that no one else would do what needed to be done, so they, of course, took it on themselves. In Chapter V I will discuss implications and recommendations to address the outlined themes presented here.

CHAPTER V

DISSCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In previous chapters I discussed how contemporary activist platforms have not seemingly developed multi-issue or multi-identity platforms (Terriquez, 2015). This absence leaves Black women regulated to situate only race in racial justice activism, leaving behind the ways in which intersectionality further impacts incidents of racial injustice. This phenomenon has been documented throughout historical understandings of both racial- and gender-based work when specifically considering the civil rights and women's liberation movements. Each movement suggested that Black women should focus on one aspect of identity in these activist spaces (Evans, 2015; hooks, 2000). Civil rights spaces wanted to keep issues around gender out of the discussions, fearing distraction from the focus of race (Simien, 2003). Similarly, the women's movement suggested concerns that were inclusive of race should solely be discussed within Civil rights spaces (Evans, 2015; hooks, 2000). In essence, there was no activist space where Black women were able to address the injustices that impacted their full selves. Considering this, I sought to examine how Black women doctoral students navigated their intersectionality within activist spaces currently. To begin the discussion the research understudy asked:

Q1 How do Black women doctoral students involved in race-based activism understand their intersectional identities?

Q2 How do Black women doctoral students involved in race-based activism believe their intersectional identities and the social injustices that impact these identities are addressed in current race-based activism?

To explore these questions I interviewed 10 Black women doctoral students involved in race-based activism. Through two interviews, participants discussed how they understood their intersectionality in the race-based activist work with which they were involved. In the first interview, the women were asked to prepare a list of issues they wished were included in the race-based activism in which they were involved that specifically addressed needs impacting Black women. Generally, the ideas that were expressed in these lists spanned multiple areas. However, the reoccurring thoughts included centering vulnerable populations of Black women, focusing on the sexual assault and/or abuse of Black women, mental health, and the underrepresentation of Black women in the academy. These created lists provided opportunities to explore what issues were important to the Black women and how they were affected by the exclusion of these items in the work. The second interview asked the Black women to tap into the emotional impact of their experiences by engaging in the development of an artistic story. Through using these tools, each woman processed their experiences and explained what it was like being a Black women engaged in race-based activism while considering their intersectionality.

The women in this study engaged in conscious and unconscious back-seating. In general Black women regulated themselves to the background in activist work for numerous reasons. In cases where the action of moving to the background evolved, the conscious back-seating related to deciding that other more marginalized voices were more important to be centered. Black women took it upon themselves to center the

most marginalized groups and/or the groups that did not have voice in activist work. Perhaps out of a need of being of service, Black women in this study mentioned the desire to speak up for others and make sure conversations about marginalized communities were taking place in activist spaces. However, none of the women seemed to do this type of maneuvering for themselves nor did they mentioned that others in activist spaces took on this role to advocate for them.

These findings are important because they begin to uncover a conversation around intersectionality in activism that is not fully being discussed. Particularly, there has been a tendency to group all Black people's experiences into a collective narrative. However, this regulates conversation around justice to being narrowly focused on particular issues that center on the dominant narrative within this community—Black heterosexual cisgender men. This often leads to the complex dynamics present among those with marginalized identities being stripped from racial justice discussions within the Black community. Findings from this research also provide insight to the socialization of Black women around relationships with Black men. There has been an unwritten rule that suggests that Black women protect and take care of Black men at all costs, which is not rooted in romantic partnership desires. Moreover, this work showcases how graduate student activists experience and participate in activism and advocacy in different ways than those experiences that have been documented among undergraduate activists.

Implications and Recommendations

Combating back-seating may be a never-ending process. The historical roots of activism and the historical legacy of Black women's roles within the Black community (Alston & McClellan, 2011; Horsford, 2012; Robnett, 1996, 1997)

communicates a story of eternal dedication to work for the betterment of all people (Edwards, 2000; Horsford, 2012; Simien, 2003). Thus, links can be made to social behavior that repeats and perpetuates current problems. However, it is important to begin thinking about ways that the feelings of isolation and marginalization can be lessened. In this section, I begin to think through some of the possible implications of this research and provide recommendations.

Black Women, Self-Care, and Mental Health

It is imperative that Black women find ways to take care of themselves. Consistently missing from the conversation with participants were ideas of self-care and rejuvenation. In essence, participants took care of others and centered other voices, but did not center their own needs or have practices of care. Being socialized to serve perhaps connected to this behavior, as this socialization did not include healing, renewal, or reenergizing. Thus, consideration for this concept should be made. Some participants did address that the focus on mental health was missing from activism they participated in. However, there was not mention of specific ways they took care of these needs for themselves.

Black women graduate students are navigating multiple stressors in addition to their doctoral student identity. These students are continuously carrying numerous pressures on their shoulders that connect to cultural and social expectations. Throughout this study, the theme of taking care of others, bringing other voices to the table, and being the ones to do the work reappeared. Many of the Black women in this study felt as if they were the glue that bonded communities together. However, there was little discussion of how these activists also found ways to take care of their

personal wellbeing at the same time. Not only did these women embrace the role of taking care of whatever work was needed, there was an expectation from others that they would do it. Breaking away from patterns of the activist savior is challenging when you are seen as a proverbial pack-mule. From being lauded as the sole group of people that swung conservative elections to progressive liberal candidates, to the expectation of the ever-present nurturer, Black women have been normalized into rescuer stereotypes (West, 1995). These stereotypes have been so commonplace, that it seems that many of us have internalized these behaviors as our chosen means of operation. This is not to say that Black women are not activists or do not choose to participate in activism on their own. However, what is happening is the additional internalization of unhealthy piling on for the sake of living up to the superhero persona. The unrealistic expectations placed on Black women are prime for adding a burden that breeds intensified stress. Still, conversations on mental health remain somewhat taboo among many diverse populations. Cultural implications may suggest that seeking outside help for issues related to mental health are not valued. Thus, mental health concerns may develop in addition to anxiety and depression that may be already occurring during doctoral programs. Therefore, the complexity of cultural and societal pressures placed on Black women doctoral students must be examined.

Developing groups such as the Combahee River Collective (Collective, 1977) that developed in the 1970s as a consciousness-raising group centered Black women and provided a space for them to focus on their needs around gender. The Combahee River Collective believed that the only people who would be the most invested in the needs of Black women were Black women themselves (Collective, 1977). Creating a community focused on the development, education, and support of Black women

participating in activism can provide needed avenues for finding holistic approaches to self-care and wellness. Having communities that allow for Black women to express their pain and discuss ways they have sought counseling and other help allows others to be validated in their own experiences. Additionally, these spaces can allow Black women to not remain in the shadows of shame for experiencing mental illness (Williams, 2009). Further, Bell (2017) articulated, "Black women are often expected to have no periods of pain" (p. 25). The idea of the strong Black woman creates a dynamic that she must press on without care, when this behavior is considered normal repair for other communities (Bell, 2017). Thus, creation of spaces of support is a radical response to these needs.

Additionally, centering therapy and spiritual practices that support navigation through the responsibility that Black women doctoral students are experiencing is imperative. A famous quote by Audre Lorde (2017) stated, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare" (p. 130). This quote illuminates my personal philosophy and is a concept all activists should embrace.

Self-care must be an act of resistance. Historically, Black women haven taken on the role of being bridge builders in activist work and continue in this role today (Alston & McClellan, 2011; Horsford, 2012; Robnett, 1996, 1997). Many of the women in this study echoed this concept while little mention of mental health and self-care practices. The perceived obligation to hold up everyone in justice-seeking activities adds intensity that in turn impacts doctoral work. There may be an additional burden materializing from feeling responsible for communicating the needs of and advocating for multiple voices in research writing. Thus, adopting a mental health plan

is necessary for these activists. Working with a counselor to examine feelings of isolation and disregard in activist work may provide Black women doctoral activists a space to determine avenues of support.

Faculty and staff can also play a role in normalizing mental health practices. Research (Evans, Bira, Gastelum, Weiss, & Vanderford, 2018) discussed the amount of stress students in graduate programs experience and also noting high levels of anxiety and depression. Going beyond a mention of metal health services available on campus to include class discussions and professional development workshops can begin to breakdown the stigma attached to seeking out help for mental health concerns.

Additionally, support groups and/or activist community processing circles must provide space for these activists to discuss their experiences. If these groups are honestly committed to the growth of justice, there must be a commitment to Black women's needs in these spaces. Providing outlets for processing would alleviate some feelings of isolation and disregard. These intentional spaces would allow much needed dialogue around the complexity of the layered experiences of intersectional identity battles with inequity.

Currently existing student organizations could also begin to incorporate discussion on intersectionality, activism, and mental health. However, developing groups that are aligned with counseling centers, affinity centers, or professional organizations is also imperative. These entities can develop more structured avenues to address the needs of this community and also create a culture of care that includes concern for the full scope of wellbeing.

Centering Black Womanhood

Higher Education needs to center conversations about womanhood and sexism to include a focus on Black women. It seems that Black women do not see themselves in this conversation. Our womanhood is stripped from us. The stereotypes of the mammy and other strong woman troupes pushes Black women to the margins as not being soft, dainty, or in need of support and service (West, 1995). And, those thoughts align with societal ideas of what makes someone's womanhood valid.

If Black women see themselves in this conversation, there will be the ability to understand how gender discrimination impacts Black women and how race impacts that experience. Graduate preparation programs should think about ways to create spaces of critical self-reflection. Considering skill development through concepts such as contemplative education, which centers meditation, self-reflection, and intentionality in its work, could be an avenue to explore (Barbezat & Bush, 2013). This practice may represent academic concepts that more intentionally align with cultural ideas of community connection and support and identity awareness.

Student Affairs Professionals and Graduate Faculty

Student affairs professionals and graduate faculty have a unique role in the lives of Black women graduate activists. Often the development of activism is reserved for focus on undergraduate students (Guiffrida, 2003; Quaye & Harper, 2007; Harvell, 2010; Hurtado, 1992; Linder & Rodriguez, 2012; Rhoads, 1997, 2016; Sorey & Gregory, 2010). It may be assumed that since the undergraduate experience is such a huge time for development of identity that development of activist identity solely happens at this time. However, as addressed by some of the Black women in this

study, the doctoral study experience is significant if formulating identity on another level. Self-authorship (Magolda & King, 2004), I would argue, takes on a new form as students may be for the first time developing a researcher/scholar identity. The process of learning to problematize literature and deeply examine topics can be fodder for new perspectives on previous beliefs. Further, with the isolation of doctoral programs, whether with their rural town locations and/or the daunting writing process, conditions are ripe for self-reflection. These unique settings may influence doctoral student activism, thus having a space to process could be helpful. Student affairs professionals and faculty should recognize this stage of development and support graduate student activists.

Student affairs professionals should develop programming geared toward graduate students shifting or developing their activism in new ways. For example, town halls on specific topics or teach-ins, where practical application techniques could be expanded and research ideas nourished, would provide an outlet for these doctoral students.

In kind, graduate faculty could use class time to have conversations on activism in the context of discussing developing research topics, journal articles, and topics for courses for those interested in faculty roles. The classroom experience presents a great opportunity for students to couple their personal lives with their academic lives. Creating space in the classroom for students to talk about issues in the national climate, coupled with their personal lenses, could be invaluable. Black women graduate student activists may be looking for a safe environment for discussion, having the classroom become a space of encouragement and knowledge production around activist work is invaluable. Having discussions on sensitive topics

are often not welcome in the classroom, so intentionally providing room in course curriculum to consider how the personal and academic can collide is significant. Considering the political climate of the nation in relation to what students are personally navigating communicates concern for the whole student. This not only nourishes scholar identity but supports mental health among Black women graduate students.

Black women graduate students may find themselves to be the only or among a few Black women in their doctoral programs. This usually means that identity is compartmentalized and/or the full scope of their identity is not present in the classroom. Honoring the idea that the personal is political and tying this to academic outcomes considers this dynamic. Moreover, helping all students navigate how to take their passions and develop those concepts into research is already an underlying process in many doctoral classes. Expanding the focus to situate activism in research development is in essence having a more holistic approach to current paradigms.

However, it is important that discussions on activism in academic research are not just an afterthought. Intentional preparation on this work that is aligned with appropriate literature, practical application, and additional mechanisms is necessary. Having intentionality in preparation will spark engaged learning that will prepare students interested in activist scholarship.

In my own practice I will incorporate techniques into my teaching to encourage activist research. Doing this creates space for discussion around scholar activism to happen in the classroom while also distinctly communicating my own pedagogy. For example, in courses on research methods I will have students take topics from news sources and/or identify social justice topics in which they connect to.

Students will then create research and article proposals based on these topics. Using examples that walk through the process of identifying a gap in literature to identify topics that situate activism will also be important. Lastly, I will address how to identify literature selection that not only meets the needs of citation but also is a deliberate centering of marginalized voices from diverse authors, which is also an act of activism.

Future Research

Unconscious and Conscious Back-Seating in the Classroom

The ideas of unconscious and conscious back-seating showed up in this study in several ways. Specifically, the concepts of centering on others first and bringing other voices to the table were significant in our conversations. Some participants shared that their navigation of a doctoral program, while they were doing the work of activism, was challenging due to the competing roles of professional and student. In whole, it would seem that if the behavior of unconscious and conscious back-seating is as engrained in Black women as the participants have indicated, this may hint to these behaviors showing up in the classroom as well. Therefore, future research should examine this dynamic to determine how this may occur.

Relationships Between Black Women and Black Men in Activism

Several times during conversations with my participants the complexity of relationships among Black men and women in activism appeared. There is some clear contention and difficult community expectations that dictate these discussions. Future research should further examine these ideas to get to the root of these dynamics. It

seems that some participants wished to break free of the confines of traditional expectations of community relationship behavior, while others were inclined to embrace it. However, this is a sensitive subject and one in which I am challenged with having in such public discourse. I comment on this discomfort in the epilogue of this dissertation.

Metaphysical Spirituality as Healing

As discussed in the implications and recommendations section, considerations for self-care and wellness are important for Black women. A purposed mechanism for this self-care may be aspects of metaphysical spirituality as a healing practice. In my own life, I have experienced centering, grounding, reflection, healing, and empowerment from my exploration of metaphysical spirituality in multiple forms. These experiences have sparked some processing around ways these practices could be a means of healing for Black women engaged in activism. There is much conversation about religion providing solace for the Black community, but exploration of metaphysical spirituality does not seem to have been fully examined in the ways I am suggesting. Much focus on spiritual connection often lands on a Christian specific ideology. Metaphysical practices do not necessarily incorporate religion, but could, which may provide space for larger inclusivity for multiple populations among Black women.

Conclusion

This research study explored the experiences of Black women doctoral student activists engaged in race-based activism. Through using multiple methods I created a layered narrative that communicated these women's feelings about their

intersectionality when involved in activist work. The methods used sought to create a supportive culturally significant dialogue. Through these techniques a personal awakening emerged through artistic means of expression. Blackout poems were used not only for their artistic quality but to also plainly share participants' thoughts. Understanding that academic research may not be accessible to everyone, the blackout poems provide a different way to read and understand the data. The use of artistic stories also furthers this notion by providing another layer of depth to the research findings.

The research uncovered sentiments that are not new in expressing the experiences of Black women in activism. However, the ways in which the participants in this study communicated their realities were unique to this work. The ideas of unconscious and conscious back-seating detail how Black women are regulated to the back-seat of focus in activism in ways that are both situated in intentionality or unawareness. Socialized to serve, fear of isolation, and bringing other voices all appeared as ways the Black women unconsciously took the back seat. While deciding, "Fuck it. I'll do it!" colored ideas of personal choice to center others first.

From these findings I discussed implications and possible recommendations with some practical application techniques. Overall, it is important to understand that support should be given to Black women who have long been the habitual nurturers of entire communities, organizations, and activist platforms. Though groups have begun to praise Black women with recognition of the work they are doing, support in terms of rallying for issues that directly impact them is minimal. Thus, future research should continue to find ways to discuss how this population has continually been left at the margins at best and invisible at worst.

Epilogue

Black women's relationship to Black men was a topic that continued to reemerge throughout this study. Many of the participants brought up the needs of Black men while we were talking about the issues that specifically impacted Black women. In particular, Black men were discussed as being the most vulnerable population. Further, there was a continuing air of protecting, saving, or defending Black men at all costs even at a disservice to Black women.

I hesitated to call out this behavior because of my own personal loyalties. I felt a sense of needing to be careful about how I addressed this for fear of isolating myself from the Black community. However, I chose to focus on it here, as a way to call attention to the dynamic but to also address that I have not fully worked through what this means and how it should be approached, if at all in my research. Yet, the more I try to avoid exploring this, the more it reemerges in my work. Thus, I may have to discover how to approach this challenge in ways that are authentic, validating, and healthy.

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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN COLORADO

Institutional Review Board

DATE:	February 22, 2018
TO:	Cherjanet Lenzy
FROM:	University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB
PROJECT TITLE:	[1167631-3] Black Women's Experiences with Race-Based Activism
SUBMISSION TYPE:	Amendment/Modification
ACTION:	APPROVAL/VERIFICATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE:	February 22, 2018
EXPIRATION DATE:	December 7, 2021

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB approves this project and verifies its status as EXEMPT according to federal IRB regulations.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records for a duration of 4 years.

If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or Sherry.May@unco.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records.

UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN COLORADO

Institutional Review Board

DATE:	January 5, 2018
TO:	Cherjanet Lenzy
FROM:	University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB
PROJECT TITLE:	[1167631-2] Black Women's Experiences with Race-Based Activism
SUBMISSION TYPE:	Amendment/Modification
ACTION:	APPROVAL/VERIFICATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE:	January 5, 2018
EXPIRATION DATE:	December 7, 2021

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB approves this project and verifies its status as EXEMPT according to federal IRB regulations.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records for a duration of 4 years.

If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or Sherry.May@unco.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records.

UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN COLORADO

Institutional Review Board

DATE:	December 7, 2017
TO:	Cherjanet Lenzy
FROM:	University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB
PROJECT TITLE:	[1167631-1] Black Women's Experiences with Race-Based Activism
SUBMISSION TYPE:	New Project
ACTION:	APPROVAL/VERIFICATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE:	December 7, 2017
EXPIRATION DATE:	December 7, 2021

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB approves this project and verifies its status as EXEMPT according to federal IRB regulations.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records for a duration of 4 years.

If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or Sherry.May@unco.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records.

APPENDIX B

REFLECTION QUESTIONS I

1. What are your first impressions of the interview?

2. What resonated with you?

3. What surprised you?

4. What is unclear for you?

5. Is there anything from the interview that you are still sitting with and want to communicate to Cherjanét?

APPENDIX C

REFLECTION QUESTIONS II

Thank you for participating in my research! It was an honor to talk with you and share experiences with you. As a final conclusion to our time together, I am asking that you complete a final reflection of the over interview process. Below are reflection questions that I ask that you answer and return to me via email. You may also add any additional reflection outside of these questions as you wish. Again, I appreciate being able to spend time with you.

Take care,

Cherjanét

1. How was the overall interview process?

2. How was it to create your ‘artistic story’?

3. What surprised you?

4. What is left unresolved for you?

5. What questions do you have?

6. How do you think participating in this study has influenced you?

APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT RESOURCE LIST EXAMPLE

Dear Participant,

Thank you for participating in my research exploring how Black women doctoral students experience race-based activism/advocacy and intersectionality. I appreciate your assistance with this work and look forward to our conversation together. I am providing below a list of resources available to you for your reference should you feel you would like support during or after the interview process. As we embark on this research together it is possible that stories you share during our interview may bring up items you would like to continue to process in another space. These resources may be of additional assistance to you.

If you have any questions, or need additional resources, please let me know. Thank you again for your participation and cooperation in this research.

Cherjanét D. Lenzy

Name	Location	Phone	Hours	Description
Monsour Counseling and Psychological Services (MCAPS)	101 South Mills Ave., Claremont, CA 91711	(909) 621-8000	M 8:30 am - 7pm,Tues and Wednesday 8:30 am – 5 pm Thurs 8:30 am – 6:30 pm Friday 8:30 am-5pm Services after 5pm by appointment only	Promotes psychological wellness for all students served by The Claremont University Consortium
Creative Insights Counseling	409 Harvard, Suite 101, Claremont CA 91711 18 E. State Street, Suite 206, Redlands, CA 92373	(909) 240-7833		Provides services: LGBTQIA, children, college students and parents, couples and families, and professional consultations
Tri-City Mental Health Services (TCMHS)	2008 N. Garey Ave., Pomona,CA 91767	(909) 623-6131 (909) 623- 9500 Toll Free	M-F 8:30 am – 5pm	Conceptualized as a comprehensive mental health service provider, dedicated to helping families and individuals of all ages reach their full potential. Through close and dedicated collaboration with the community it serves, TCMHS has successfully created an integrated system of care that ensures access and enhances mental and emotional health. Available services include but are not limited to psychotherapy, clinical case management, medication support, peer-to-peer support, psychoeducation, linkage and referral, vocational training and support, socialization activities, and community outreach.

Note. LBGTQIA = lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual.

APPENDIX E

RESEARCH REFLECTION PROMPT

Research Reflection Prompt: Participant List

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this research study. Please read the below prompt and respond. You will be asked to bring this list with you to interview #1 and provide a copy to myself. I will ask you about the list that you completed in the context of the interview.

Prompt:
Thinking about your intersecting identities as a Black Women and the race-based activist/advocacy groups, organizations and/or activities that you have done activism with please create a list of the current social injustices that impact Black women that have not been addressed in these spaces that you would like to see happen. This list can be as long or as short as you see fit.

Definition:
Intersecting identity can be described as the simultaneous interplay of identity categories (Crenshaw, 1991). Collectively these intersecting identities also have accompanying oppression that further impacts one's lived experience. For instance Black Women encompass the identities of race and gender and experience both racism and sexism together (Crenshaw, 1991).

Please let me know if you need additional information before completing this list.
- Cherjanét

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW I PROTOCOL

I. Introduction

a. My name and background
b. Consent form overview
c. Interview process overview
   - Interview 1: sent transcripts to review. Upon receiving transcripts you will have 7 days to review, correct any errors, and note any additional comments. If I do not hear from you within the 7 days, I will assume it is correct and I will move forward.
   - More of conversation.
d. Any questions?

Interview Questions:

1. Tell me the story about your intersectional identities.

2. When did you discover this, what does that mean for you?

3. The list that you previously created will apply to the next few questions…Previously, I sent you a prompt asking you to create a list, do you have that list with you? Can you share with me what you created?

   Review List: Thinking about your intersecting identities as a Black Woman and the race-based activist groups, organizations and/or activities that you have done activism/advocacy with please create a list of the current social injustices that impact Black women that have not been addressed in these spaces that you would like to see happen. This list can be as long or as short as you see fit.

4. Describe a time when you were engaged in race-based activism/advocacy and felt like your intersectional identities were not being recognized, included and/or honored.

5. Tell me a time when participating in race-based activism/advocacy that you felt you had to put needs or concerns aside because they did not align with the group agenda/efforts.

6. Describe a time when you noticed your experiences with race-based activism influenced your experiences as a doctoral student and how this made you feel.

7. Were you ever taught about how Black women were impacted by racism and sexism? If so how?

II. Final Thoughts

- Anything else you'd like to share?
- Our next interview is scheduled for _____
- I have provided reflection questions. You can use these to reflect or something else. These questions are a guide. I will ask about your reflection during our second interview, but that does not to be super formal. I just wanted to provide options, just in case.

*** During the second interview I am asking that you create art (read prompt). If we were in person I would provide art supplies that you could take home to create something if you would like time to reflect.

a) If not, I will provide supplies during our in person conversation and I will give you time to create during our interview. I will also create an artistic reflection and share.
b) Where would you like to meet for our second interview?

Prompt:
Please write, draw, or create an image or narrative that explains your experience as an intersectional Black women engaged in race-based activism. Please feel free to be as creative as you would like. Art for the purpose of this research experience is widely defined. If you would like to write poetry, create music or use some other art medium, please feel free to do so. You are also welcome to use any digital resources that you have as well. Digital resources include, but are not limited to video, social media outlets, or digital recordings. General supplies such as writing utensils, crayons, paper, playdough, clay, etc. will be provided, but please feel free to use other items you have at your disposal as well.

APPENDIX G

ARTISTIC STORY PROMPT

‘Artistic Story’ Prompt

Thank you for your continued interest in participating in this research study. Please read the prompt below and follow the instructions.

Prompt:
Please write, draw, or create an image or narrative that explains your experience as an intersectional Black women engaged in race-based activism. Please feel free to be as creative as you would like. Art for the purpose of this research experience is widely defined. If you would like to write poetry, create music or use some other art medium, please feel free to do so. You are also welcome to use any digital resources that you have as well. Digital resources include, but are not limited to video, social media outlets, or digital recordings. General supplies such as writing utensils, crayons, paper, playdogh, clay, etc. will be provided, but please feel free to use other items you have at your disposal as well.

Please let me know if you need additional information before your artistic story.

- *Cherjanét*